



Death in Medieval Europe

Death Scripted and Death Choreographed

Edited by JOËLLE ROLLO-KOSTER

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DEATH IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

“This is an excellent collection of essays which will significantly increase our knowledge and understanding of medieval views on and experiences of death. Of particular value is the breadth and scope of the essays presented, ranging from discussions of commemoration and ritualistic aspects of death and capital punishment over to differing cultural perceptions of death beyond Christian to Jewish and Muslim communities. As such this volume will be welcome by anyone interested in medieval daily life and culture, academics and students alike.”

Miriam Muller, *University of Birmingham, UK*

Death in Medieval Europe: Death Scripted and Death Choreographed explores new cultural research into death and funeral practices in medieval Europe and demonstrates the important relationship between death and the world of the living in the Middle Ages.

Across ten chapters, the articles in this volume survey the cultural effects of death. This volume explores overarching topics such as burials, commemorations, revenants, mourning practices and funerals, capital punishment, suspicious death, and death registrations, using case studies from across Europe including England, Iceland, and Spain. Together these chapters discuss how death was ritualized and choreographed, but also how it was expressed in writing throughout various documentary sources including wills and death registries. In each instance, records are analyzed through a cultural framework to better understand the importance of the authors of death and their audience.

Drawing together and building upon the latest scholarship, this book is essential reading for all students and academics of death in the medieval period.

Joëlle Rollo-Koster is Professor of Medieval History at the University of Rhode Island. She is the author of *Raiding Saint Peter: Empty Sees, Violence, and the Initiation of the Great Schism (1378)* (2008), and *Avignon and its Papacy (1309–1417): Popes, Institutions, and Society* (2015).

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2017
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-80212-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-80213-1 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-46685-9 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by Taylor & Francis Books

**This book is dedicated to the memory of Capt. Eric J. Shaw,
USCG Ret.**

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This collaborative volume was born from conversations with Laura Pilsworth, editor for Medieval and Early Modern History at Routledge, whom here at the outset I wish to thank for her support. It became evident during our discussions together that after some two generations of academic research and reflection on the medieval experience of death a historiographical review of the state of the field would be a valuable addition. Not that this volume aims at being purely historiographical, but rather it looks also to death as a cultural phenomenon.

For his sound editorial touch on Mikhail A. Boytsov's article as well as my own, I wish to thank Joseph H. Pearson. For her translation of Franck Collard's article I am grateful to Tegan Raleigh. This translation was supported in part by a grant from the University of Rhode Island's Center for the Humanities.

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INTRODUCTION

Joëlle Rollo-Koster

In October 2014, a popular medieval website decided to showcase *memento mori*, the well-known spiritual exercise of the Middle Ages that leads us to reflect on the fleeting nature of human existence, lifting our focus from the short-lived vanities of the day-to-day and re-directing our gaze to the horizon of eternity. The website satisfied a certain modern fascination with a putative medieval obsession with death, especially in the period after the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century. Its materials traced a steady development from death considered dispassionately and in the abstract to personified death, macabre dissolution, and decay.¹

Images of death abounded in the later Middle Ages; in their relation to *memento mori*, they were an essential element of those ascetic practices by which medieval folk grew familiar with death and prepared for its inevitable coming. Funeral art specialized in corpses and skeletons accompanying the effigies of the departed; diabolical animals and beastly demons terrorized the protesting dead; and various iterations of the *danse macabre* (or “dance of death”) united young and old, rich and poor in an ultimate farandole lead by death herself.

Medieval death. No historian a few generations ago could have claimed (or even dreamed!) to specialize in the history of death, or indeed to propose actually teaching it. Simply stated, the field did not exist. But Philippe Ariès changed that state of affairs. Ariès’ study, *The Hour of Our Death*, subjected our inevitable shared fate to academic scrutiny.² The wide chronological and geographical ambit of his ground-breaking work surveyed attitudes toward death from the ancient past to the present. His self-defined obsession reframed modern sensibilities and filled a

1 <http://www.medievalists.net/2014/10/29/memento-mori-medieval-images-death>. Accessed June 3, 2016.

2 Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1981). Originally published in France as *L’homme devant la mort* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977).

void, identifying when medieval death (up to that time, simple, familiar, and public) became its modern incarnation (hidden, closeted, and banished from society). Dividing his work into two books comprising five parts,³ Ariès was the first academic to make death a matter of historiographical inquiry. He traced mentalities and attitudes throughout the ancient and early medieval worlds, when an ever-present death led to awareness and preparedness; to a central medieval period focused on individualism and readiness for the Last Judgment; then to an eighteenth century that worshipped death and mourning; and finally, to a twentieth century that banished it from the consciousness and sight of the living. This masterful narrative of Ariès also drew back the dark veil that concealed how modern historians conceptualized death, reminding us that we cannot project our own mentalities onto the past.

Yet it may be worth remembering that the milieu out of which *The Hour of Our Death* came – Europe in the 1970s – is not our own. In that world without the internet, web browsers, digital access, Facebook and Tweeting, Ariès surely could not have envisioned that nearly fifty years after his publication a later generation would be plunged back into a world where death has again become omnipresent. Remorseless death is immediately present to us and inescapable. Terrorist groups decapitate live on YouTube and relentless images of catastrophe, war, and mayhem leap from our computer or cell phone screens: death is too much with us. How could Ariès have foreseen our new situation, when reminders of mortality are as near as Facebook and as ceaseless as a Twitter feed – a savage contemporary iteration of the medieval *memento mori* and *ymago mortis*? Death is indeed institutionalized and memorialized when television networks and public museums chronicle the history of death.⁴ So, again, death is no more hidden away in our twenty-first century than it was six hundred years ago.

Ariès was midwife at the birth of a new historical specialization which takes up for legitimate academic inquiry what had been shunned for centuries or reserved to antiquarian narratives. Generally speaking, in the past decades historians have returned to his dichotomy between a medieval world where death was “tamed” and a modern one from which death is absent, in various ways developing or demurring from certain lines of Ariès’ project. A complete historiography detailing the varied directions of recent historical research would exceed our scope here, but the lasting influence of his book is reflected in the wide range of scholarly literature it subsequently inspired.⁵

3 Book One: *Sleepers of Stone*, comprises: The Tame Death, and The Death of the Self; Book Two: *Death Untamed*, comprises: Remote and Imminent Death, The Death of the Other, and Invisible Death.

4 See for example <https://www.facebook.com/Imago-Mortis-Mediating-Images-of-Death-in-Late-Medieval-Culture-227172494088458>; <https://www.facebook.com/Memento-Mori-Images-343779752435258/?fref=nf>; <http://www.history.co.uk/study-topics/history-of-death>; <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/a-very-short-history-of-death>; http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/death_middle_ages. Accessed June 3, 2016.

5 See, in chronological order, Joachim Whaley, ed., *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), one of the earliest English-language works to address Ariès’ ground-breaking historiography; Ellen Badone, *The*

Following along paths Ariès first indicated, contemporary historians have sometimes drawn on the insights of cultural anthropology, noticing the production of shared communal attitudes toward death, especially as these are seen in the middling classes. Practices of memorialization have also garnered special notice, with, at least in one instance, a methodology that takes up a medical approach. A recent work highlights death as “un-American,” while another traces the spatial occupation of Victorian cemeteries.

Still, Ariès’ greatest impact was perhaps in the field of his own specialization, medieval studies. He opened *The Hour of Our Death* with a vivid account of the rituals of death in the Middle Ages. Death was then familiar, predicted, expected. If the dying sensed their approaching end, the premonitions of mortality gave them time to plan their passing. Most medieval folk were comforted in knowing that death was close, since they considered a death that was sudden and unprepared-for to be evidence of God’s just judgment against their sins. Once the dying knew that their hour was coming, they did not resist their fate but meekly yielded to it. Ariès’ description of the dramaturgy of their passing has the air of a procedural. On the death bed, it was important that the body was composed in fitting postures dramatizing, in a kind of performative enactment, how much the dying were recollected in themselves, how much they regretted their past misdeeds, and how religiously they met their demise. They bid farewell to the world, and at last recommended their souls to God before expiring.

Medieval historians eventually returned to the claims that Ariès had made in “Tamed Death” and they checked, refined, or debunked his methodology: in fact, they asked, was the early medieval period focused on preparation and acceptance of death, while

Appointed Hour: Death, Worldview, and Social Change in Brittany (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Sylvia M. Barnard, *To Prove I’m Not Forgotten: Living and Dying in a Victorian City* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990) which focuses on the spatial occupation of Victorian cemeteries; Zohreh Bayatrizi, *Life Sentences: The Modern Ordering of Mortality* (Toronto [Ont.]: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America’s Culture of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008); James W. Green, *Beyond the Good Death: The Anthropology of Modern Dying* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). It is of note that many publications in the 2000–2010 years resulted from what I would label the Jack Kevorkian effect and the rights surrounding end-of-life decisions. Gilad Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory: Germany Remembers Its Dead of World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); David James Stewart, *The Sea their Graves: An Archaeology of Death and Remembrance in Maritime Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011); Lawrence R. Samuel, *Death, American Style: A Cultural History of Dying in America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), who underscores the United States’ reserve, and unpreparedness in dealing with the topic; Donald T. Siebert, *Mortality’s Muse: The Fine Art of Dying* (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2013); William M. Spellman, *A Brief History of Death* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014); and Michael K. Rosenow, *Death and Dying in the Working Class, 1865–1920* (Baltimore, Maryland: Project Muse, 2015). For a medical perspective see, Robert Woods, *Death Before Birth: Fetal Health and Mortality in Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

the later medieval era shifted toward individualism? Following Ariès' lead, historians of medieval and early modern confraternities were first to consider these institutions as a "guarantee for eternity." Ariès had made his point clear when he said, "Of all the works of mercy, the service for the dead became the main purpose of the confraternities ... the confraternities ... provided assurance regarding the afterlife. The dead were assured of the prayers of their confrères ... after burial, the confraternity continued the services and prayers that the church council or monasteries were suspected of neglecting or forgetting."⁶ The field of confraternal studies exploded in the 1990s when the Society for Confraternity Studies, hosted by the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, was founded at the University of Toronto, Canada.

Historians also turned to a cultural study of death, examining its depiction in writing and images, the role of mourning and funeral rituals in propaganda and politics, and to demographic, medical, and economic data. Studies concerning the Black Death became intimately linked with death studies in general. In addition, the appearance of modern-day epidemics (like the one caused by the Ebola virus) has stimulated specialized studies of medieval diseases and epidemics, principally the Black Death.⁷ In short, it may be said somewhat ironically: in medieval studies, death is quite lively.⁸

- 6 Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, 185. I trace this historiography in my "Forever After: The Dead in the Avignonese Confraternity of Notre Dame la Majour (1329–1381)," *Journal of Medieval History* 25 (1999): 115–140, and *The People of Curial Avignon: A Critical Edition of the Liber Divisionis and the Matriculae of Notre Dame la Majour* (Lampeter, UK, and Lewiston, NY USA: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009). For a more complete bibliography on confraternal studies see the website and publications of *Confraternitas*, The Society for Confraternity Studies and the recent *Studi confraternali: orientamenti, problemi, testimonianze*, ed. Marina Gazzini (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2009), published online in the series *Reti Medievali*, E-Book.
- 7 The historiography is immense. I will only refer to the work of Monica Green in general, and the recent collection of essays that she edited for the opening issue of the new free access online journal, *The Medieval Globe* 1 (2014) entitled "Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World – Rethinking the Black Death" accessible at http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/medieval_globe. Accessed June 3, 2016.
- 8 This list is far from exhaustive, it only serves as a chronological example of the vitality of the field, and I have omitted scores of articles that have been published in refereed journals: Jacques Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité de l'au-delà: Les hommes, la mort et la religion dans la région d'Avignon à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris: De Boccard, 1980); Marie-Thérèse Lorcin, *Vivre et mourir en Lyonnais à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1981); Herman Braet and Werner Verbeke, *Death in the Middle Ages* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1983); Jane H. M. Taylor, ed., *Dies Illa: Death in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the 1983 Manchester Colloquium* (Liverpool, UK: F. Cairns, 1984); Steven Bassett, *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100–1600* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992); Samuel Kline Cohn, *The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death: Six Renaissance Cities in Central Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Patrick J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Danièle Alexandre-Bidon, *La mort au Moyen Âge: XIIIe-XVIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1998); Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Edelgard E. DuBruck

Because it was mundane and overly ritualized, there is a lingering impression in modern minds that our medieval forebears found death comforting. Certainly, death was familiar and formulaic. “Nothing is more certain than death but nothing is more uncertain than its hour:” thus did many medieval testators rationalize their wills, ending the formula with “...and not wishing to die intestate,” they enumerated their bequests. According to the medieval ceremonial books (*ordines*) that stipulated protocol at the papal court, when a pope died, cardinals wore black or dark-colored coats lined with fur. Only the pope’s kin and those he had elevated to their current positions wore the dark blue coats of mourning. Fitting words and gestures choreographed the often far-from-orderly transfers of papal power. Not that the chronological distance that separates us from the Middle Ages has altered the basic human need for these somewhat comforting rituals. A *New York Times* article of June 21, 2014, entitled “Rite of the Sitting Dead: Funeral Poses Mimic Life” discusses the elaborate theatrical setting of certain funerals in New Orleans where the dead want to be seen a last time in acts they practiced routinely – for example, smoking a cigarette or fighting in a boxing ring.⁹

and Barbara I. Gusick, *Death and Dying in the Middle Ages* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Paul H. Freedman and Caroline Walker Bynum, *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); John Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Mark A. Handley, *Death, Society and Culture: Inscriptions and Epitaphs in Gaul and Spain, AD 300–750* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2003); Robert Bartlett, *The Hanged Man: A Story of Miracle, Memory, and Colonialism in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Katariina Mustakallio, *Hoping for Continuity: Childhood, Education and Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2005); Emily Rebekah Huber, “Oh Death!”: *Death, Dying, and the Culture of the Macabre in the Late Middle Ages* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Libraries, 2005); A. Alduc-Le Bagousse, *Inhumations de prestige ou prestige de l’inhumation?: expressions du pouvoir dans l’au-delà, IV^e-XV^e siècle* (Caen: Publications du CRAHM, 2009); Achim Thomas Hack, *Alter, Krankheit, Tod und Herrschaft im frühen Mittelalter: das Beispiel der Karolinger* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 2009); Sophie Balace, and Alexandra de Poorter, *Entre paradis et enfer: mourir au Moyen Âge, 600–1600* (Bruxelles: Fonds Mercatorfonds, 2010); Christian Krötzel, and Katariina Mustakallio, eds, *On Old Age: Approaching Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012); Ashby Kinch, *Imago Mortis: Mediating Images of Death in Late Medieval Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Duncan Sayer, Howard Williams, and H. Härke, *Mortuary Practices and Social Identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in Burial Archaeology in Honour of Heinrich Härke* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013); Frederick S. Paxton, and Isabelle Cochelin, *The Death Ritual at Cluny in the Central Middle Ages. Le rituel de la mort à Cluny au Moyen Âge central* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); Nicolas Bock, Ivan Foletti, and Michele Tommasi, *L’évêque, l’image et la mort: identité et mémoire au Moyen Âge* (Roma: Viella, 2014); Delphine Boyer-Gardner and Mathieu Vivas, *Déplacer les morts: voyages, funérailles, manipulations, exhumations et réinhumations de corps au Moyen Âge* (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2014); Amy Appleford, *Learning to Die in London, 1380–1540* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); and Elizabeth C. Tingle, *Dying, Death, Burial and Commemoration in Reformation Europe* (Farnham Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).

9 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/22/us/its-not-the-living-dead-just-a-funeral-with-flair.html?_r=1. Accessed June 3, 2016.

Although the Middle Ages invented quite distinctive funereal forms, texts, and gestures, and indeed stipulated an elaborate dramaturgy of dying, the modern scholarly focus has not restricted itself only to the positive and concrete. Scholarly inquiry has ranged across the effects of these cultural forms and (sometimes) the failure of these rituals. If words, acts, and rites function effectively most of the time, their failure is also indicative of societal-cultural issues. Historians learn from successful or failed rituals. Thus the articles collected together in this present volume attempt to survey the cultural effects of death.

Jill Hamilton Clements revisits Ariès' claim that early medieval burials were usually anonymous in order to demonstrate the form and function of Anglo-Saxon commemorative texts and to address written identity and memorialization. Her work is ground-breaking for the early medieval period; in contrast, the later Middle Ages has been well-researched with respect to the topic of memorialization.¹⁰ Apparitions, ghosts, revenants, and zombies are the focus of the next two chapters that bring us to the world of the corporeal undead. Kirsi Kanerva focuses on the subordinate and unruly character of Icelandic sagas and Eddic dead who willingly or unwillingly reappeared in their uncorrupted corporeal form. Her conclusions raise larger questions concerning the rapport between indigenous and external influences (Christianity in this case). Meanwhile, Winston Black reminds us that our modern-day fascination with zombies (revenants) finds its roots in the medieval past, most commonly in periods of anxiety and cultural upheaval. Black demonstrates how revenants, who crowded the pages of northern European writings for roughly a century (from 1130 to 1230), symptomized how much the newly developing "scholastic age" preoccupied itself with the body.

Leaving the world of the undead, Cynthia Sautter breaks ground on a topic rarely discussed: the role of women in mourning rituals, and specifically, the sounds of death, with accompanying gestures and music. Of course, best-known here is the ever-present medieval *danse macabre* or "dance of death."¹¹ But in her Jewish,

10 See my "Forever After: The Dead in the Avignonesse Confraternity of Notre Dame la Majour (1329–1381)" and *The People of Curial Avignon*, where I address the historiography of written commemoration in later medieval confraternities. See also, Nicholas Terpstra, "Confraternities and Mendicant Orders: The Dynamics of Lay and Clerical Brotherhood in Renaissance Bologna," *The Catholic Historical Review* 82 (1996): 1–22, and *The Politics of Ritual Kinship: Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999); Katherine L. French, "Maidens' Lights and Wives' Stores: Women's Parish Guilds in Late Medieval England," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 29.2 (1998): 399–425; Samuel K. Cohn, "Piety and Religious Practice in the Rural Dependencies of Renaissance Florence," *The English Historical Review* 114 (1999): 1121–1142; Roisin Cossar, "The Quality of Mercy: Confraternities and Public Power in Medieval Bergamo," *Journal of Medieval History* 27.2 (2001): 139–157; Linda Guzzetti and Antje Ziemann, "Women in the Fourteenth-Century Venetian Scuole," *Renaissance Quarterly* 55.4 (2002): 1151–1195; Sarah Covington, "Consolation on Golgotha: Comforters and Sustainers of Dying Priests in England, 1580–1625," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60.2 (2009): 270–293; Ian Forrest, "The Politics of Burial in Late Medieval Hereford," *The English Historical Review* 125.516 (2010): 1110–1138.

11 See for example, Elina Gertsman, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages: Image, Text, Performance* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2010).

Christian, and Muslim texts, Sautter hopes to recover the actual sound of medieval death; the cries, the feet beating the ground, and hand-clapping, all part of the grieving process. Francine Michaud follows with her magisterial, succinct study of a field that has received abundant attention recently: the ubiquitous wills and testaments. In the testaments left to us from the Middle Ages, we encounter both the individuality of each dead person and we see a shared ancestral conceptualization of death. As legal documents, wills may be formulaic but they are also our entryway into the mind, and thus into the mentalities and affective lives, of people long gone. By means of a survey that is intentionally historiographical, her contribution covers a broad chronological range with an abundance of material spanning the southern and northern European continents.

James Davis and, to a certain extent, the following two articles authored by Mikhail A. Boytsov and myself, address the codes, rituals, and formulae of death. The focus of Davis' article centers upon capital punishment in England; a topic well-researched for the continent, but perhaps less well-known for the Atlantic islands. While the death sentence was rare, the elaborately ritualized protocol surrounding it served an important social function. Because retributive justice was linked to spiritual salvation, the correct performance of the funeral rites of executed criminals cleansed the body politic – thus, the formulae and rites of death served the social purposes of the living. For Boytsov and myself, we see how in various ways funeral rituals eased political transitions. Ritual articulated the passing evanescence of body and person without endangering the permanence of titles and institutions. Ritual offered political continuity and minimized socio-political disruption. Horsemen represented dead princes and kings, and embalmed popes were staged for audiences to see in the mortal remains something that persisted beyond the individual's passing, that is, the abiding institutional character of the papacy.

Returning to the literary qualities of scripting death, Franck Collard addresses a long-standing misconception that medieval people did not question death and always accepted its timing as an act of God. Plunging into the medieval psychology of dying he shows us how medieval people questioned death, even more so when they considered that it had occurred at an inappropriate time and under suspicious circumstances. And finally, Ann G. Carmichael concludes the volume with her analysis of plague death registers in early-modern Milan. Here she shows how writing and memorialization were intrinsically tied together in the mind of layfolk who, even if too poor to be registered in an obituary, found contentment in knowing that the Milanese administration who recorded their passing would identify them by name and on paper. Carmichael demonstrates that there can be a happy meeting of individual desires with state development and administrative necessity.

In 1993, Danièle Alexandre-Bidon and Cécile Treffort entitled their collection of essays, *Á réveiller les morts*, as if the words of historians could awaken the deeply slumbering dead.¹² Their discussions pointed to certain lacunae in the

12 Danièle Alexandre-Bidon and Cécile Treffort, *Á réveiller les morts: La mort au quotidien dans l'occident médiéval* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1993).

historiography. We do not know much about the sound of death, the ringing of the death knell, the mixing of prayers and cries; we do not know much about the smell of death, fragrant incense, and decaying bodies. We do not know much about the colors of death or how, in western Christendom, the black of deep mourning eclipsed other colors. If death was so serenely accepted we still do not know its pedagogy; because such acceptance had to be learned. But what we do know is that medieval death was symbiotically tied to the world of the living and, as shown in the articles gathered here, it was scripted and choreographed with exacting care.

1

WRITING AND COMMEMORATION IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Jill Hamilton Clements

In his influential work on Western views of death and dying, *The Hour of Our Death* (1981), Philippe Ariès argues that the early Middle Ages witnessed the near-complete anonymity of burial owing to the lack of both readers and skilled engravers.¹ He contends that, as a result, there was a loss of the sense of self that was rediscovered only after the eleventh century through a revival of epitaphs and portraiture of the dead. These statements overgeneralize such trends, however, since tomb inscriptions, epitaphs, and portraiture – though rare by comparison with the later Middle Ages – did not disappear from early medieval Europe. The use of writing to commemorate the dead is apparent from evidence on both stone and parchment, from gravestone inscriptions to memorial books. This chapter traces the form and function of Anglo-Saxon commemorative texts, demonstrating how the perceived permanence of writing was exploited by Anglo-Saxon authors as a mechanism of remembrance of the dead by present and future readers.

For the Anglo-Saxon religious and elite – like their European neighbors – the use of writing to remember the dead was one of many uses for written texts following their conversion to Christianity, and the concern for the fate of the soul after death was the driving force behind this commemorative use of writing. The Anglo-Saxons recorded their dead in a number of genres: confraternity lists; *libri vitae* (“books of life” meant to emulate the celestial book opened by Christ at Judgment in which the names of the saved are inscribed); obits and necrologies, which record death dates; inscriptions on stone markers and other monuments; epitaphs on gravestones and copied in manuscripts; relic tags and lists of relics; and – for the exceptional and saintly – written narratives of the life and death of the deceased that express their special qualities. These sources provide the most immediate evidence of the

1 Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

convergence of writing and death in Anglo-Saxon England, inscribing the dead into memory both literally and figuratively. In addition to other functions, including marking the location of the body, labeling the body part of a saint, or recording the story of a remarkable death, these written objects enabled the living to remember the dead in prayer. Posthumous prayers officially began at the individual's funeral and continued at designated intervals after the date of death, depending on that individual's position and any provisions – such as celebrations on the anniversary of death – requested in exchange for bequests to the church.² In essence, having participated in the liturgy as part of the laity or clerical order during life, the dead continued to participate, since “Even after death the faithful kept up their roles in the liturgical assembly, through the efforts of the living on their behalf.”³ One's inclusion in the liturgy often meant having one's name recorded in – and perhaps also read aloud from – a memorial list or book, which would have been placed on the altar during the celebration of Mass. The dead might also participate metonymically in services carried out at the church through the inscription of their names on the donated objects that were used during Mass, including the church building itself – a practice that remains visible on the surviving Anglo-Saxon dedication stones and plates.⁴

With issues of permanence and transience deeply imbedded in the Anglo-Saxon literary aesthetic, the interest in writing's ability to preserve the names and lives of those no longer present had particular ramifications for the Anglo-Saxon commemoration of the dead. The name is treated as a manifestation of personhood: in life, the name signifies the embodied person; in death, the physical, inscribed object replaces the body, as the living now interact with this inscribed object, bringing the individual to mind. In most cases the dead (while still living) did not write their own names, which were instead inscribed by professional carvers or scribes, but the inscription of their identity *becomes* a type of bodily presence once the physical body inevitably disappears; as Laura Kendrick remarks, “Although writing is a way of controlling one's own physical disappearance, it also denies that disappearance by substituting for the body the continuity of the line in space, the line imagined as the trace of the body, the body's presence implicit in the linear trace.”⁵ The

- 2 The role of prayer for the dead in the construction of social identity is discussed by Julia Crick in “Posthumous Obligation and Family Identity,” in *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. William O. Frazer and Andrew Tyrrell (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 2000), 193–208. Prayer for the dead was not desired solely by members of religious orders, but was desired also by laypeople in the early Middle Ages, as seen in the requests (or demands) for prayers for the soul in Anglo-Saxon wills and the bequests recorded in charters.
- 3 Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 27. See also Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 34–37.
- 4 For example, the eighth-century lead plate from Flixborough inscribed with seven personal names is thought to have once been affixed to an altar or a reliquary, commemorating those individuals; see Dawn M. Hadley, *Death in Medieval England: An Archaeology* (Stroud: Tempus, 2001), 130.
- 5 Laura Kendrick, *Animating the Letter: The Figurative Embodiment of Writing from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 12.

perdurability of writing, which imitates permanence in its ability to “speak” for the absent speaker, allows it to be invested with the words and identities of the deceased, giving the dead a textual presence where they can no longer maintain a bodily one. Since these memorial inscriptions were meant to invoke remembrance in their readers for the purpose of praying for the deceased – with some inscriptions using formulas that directly appeal for prayer for the named dead, such as “pray for the soul of N.” – the inscribed name embodies the dead in memory as a tangible, legible object whose interaction with the living directly affects the deceased’s salvation; the individual’s fate is irrevocably tied to the text. So although writing the dead is in a sense pragmatic, since keeping a record of the dead for their recollection in prayer has a practical function, these inscriptions are more than simply *aides-mémoire*. They are also highly symbolic, serving as an earthly imitation of the divine writing that is a metaphor for the individual’s salvation.

Written in heaven: the model for writing the dead

In medieval Christian teaching, the dominant metaphor for attaining eternal life was inscription – being written into the *liber vitae* (“book of life”) that Christ will open at Judgment. The basis for this metaphor is found in scripture, as John the Apostle writes about his vision of the Last Judgment in Revelation, “I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev. 20:12).⁶ These books record all of one’s deeds, and the consequences for not being written in Christ’s *liber vitae* are severe: “whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the pool of fire” (Rev. 20:15). By the same token, one of the metaphors for eternal damnation was erasure – being forgotten not only by posterity, but also by God. The association of damnation with being unknown to God is found in Christ’s discussion of the Last Judgment in the Gospel of Matthew: many will cry out to Christ and profess His name on that day, but Christ will respond, “I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:23). This equation of erasure of identity and remembrance is also found in the Psalmist’s prayers against his persecutors: “May his posterity be cut off; in one generation may his name be blotted out. May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered in the sight of the Lord: and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out” (Ps. 108:13–14).⁷ In this way, writing and erasing become metaphors for the work of memory and human fate; to be written is to be remembered by God.

The figuring of salvation as inscription – being “marked” among the elect – is exploited across the corpus of surviving texts from Anglo-Saxon England, from

6 All quoted passages from the Bible are from the *Douay-Rheims* translation.

7 The request that the persecutor’s name be “blotted out” (*deleatur*) – but the sins remembered – is glossed in numerous Anglo-Saxon psalters as “adilgod,” a verb used specifically in discussions of writing for the practices of rubbing out, wiping off, and erasing.

metaphors of salvific writing in both verse and prose to the material iterations of such writing in Anglo-Saxon commemorative texts and funerary inscriptions. Having one's name inscribed on the pages of a memorial book – or other commemorative objects that imitate Christ's celestial *liber vitae* – was to anticipate one's salvation; the actual written text was an image of one's hope for remembrance and wholeness of identity within the community of the saved in heaven. In other words, to be written among the saved on earth was to anticipate being fully present and counted among the saved at Judgment.

The idea of the mind as an inscribable surface and remembrance as inscription is found in the Anglo-Saxons' use of the metaphor of writing to illustrate salvation. Drawing on the description of salvation in the Gospels as having one's name "written in heaven," which is found frequently in early Christian homilies and commentaries, Anglo-Saxon authors often manipulate or expand this metaphor to give emphasis to the inscription as a correlative for the memory. The salvation of the elect – that is, after death and at Judgment – is figured as an inscription that embodies their identity not simply "in heaven," but within the memory. This manipulation of the metaphor of being "written in heaven" appears, for example, in Homily V of the Vercelli Book. The homilist sets out his discussion of the Nativity with the miracles at Christ's birth and the nature of man's salvation. He states,

The gospel said that earth was written when Christ was born. In that it was betokened that he came in human form, he who intended to write the names of his chosen ones in the eternal memory of the blessed life, as he himself ordered and so said, "Rejoice and celebrate because your names are written in heaven."⁸

Expressing the written nature of salvation, the homilist here makes a significant adaptation to both his source in this passage, a homily by Gregory the Great, and the scriptural reference he includes here, which blends Matthew 5:12 and Luke 10:20.⁹ While this passage of Gregory's homily describes Christ as the one "who would write (or 'enroll') his elect in eternity" and both Matthew and Luke have the names of the chosen written "in heaven," the Vercelli homilist changes *what* exactly is being inscribed.¹⁰ Rather than the writing of the elect in heaven or eternity, he says they were written "in the eternal memory," suggesting that the Anglo-Saxon homilist viewed the memory (*gemynd*) of God as an inscribable surface on which the saved are written. Placed in league with the concepts of heaven and eternity, the memory in Homily V is likewise figured as permanent, securing the chosen in the text of memory. In this regard, *gemynd* has the more concrete

8 Vercelli Homily V.100–105, in *The Vercelli Homilies*, ed. D. G. Scragg, EETS o.s. 300 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 116. All translations of Old English are my own.

9 See Scragg's note on Vercelli Homily V.100–105.

10 Ibid.

sense of “memorial” or “record,” figuring remembrance in heaven as a tangible, inscribed object.¹¹ The writing is in effect an “eternal memorial” of the elect, whose remembrance is ensured through their names’ inscription on this surface. Like the Anglo-Saxon memorials and gravestones discussed below, inscribing the names of the dead is figured as equivalent to remembrance, which, although temporary on earthly surfaces, is made permanent in heaven.

Celestial writing that prefigures the salvation of the elect is also explicitly treated in Vercelli Homily X, which uses the concepts of writing and erasure as metaphors for the fate of humanity. The section on the Incarnation and promise of salvation (lines 9 to 54), which appears to be an original composition and has no known source in either Latin or Old English, includes an innovative description of salvation in terms of written rights:

Before this we were made orphans, when we were forbidden the heavenly kingdom and we were erased from the powerful original charter, in which we were written in heaven. We were now thereafter marked through the true Creator and through the living God and through the begotten Son, our Lord, for the joy of paradise.¹²

Couched in the language of both writing and “being written,” salvation is here expressed “in the social practices of inheritance and land tenure,” all of which circulate around the notion of a written, celestial document.¹³ The homilist explains the failure of humanity to uphold its first covenant with God, described as an “original charter” (*frumgewrit*) into which mankind was written; as a result, mankind was “erased” (*adilgode*) from this divine charter, leaving all of humanity orphans bereft of the inheritance of heaven.¹⁴ The homilist thus explains the salvation offered through the birth of Christ as the opportunity for humanity’s “re-inscription”: through Christ, mankind is now “marked” (*amearcode*) for paradise and the heavenly inheritance restored. This notion of “documenting” one’s salvation is contained not merely by the image of the foundational charter and thus the writing *of* the elect, but the writing *on* the elect: the homilist conceives of salvation at once as a celestial inscription on this heavenly document and as a written mark borne by the saved. Stating that “We were now thereafter marked” (*amearcode*), the homilist

11 See s.v. *mynd* in J. R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th ed. with a supplement by H. Merritt (Cambridge, 1960; repr. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

12 Vercelli Homily X.35–40.

13 See Scott Thompson Smith, *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 135. See also the discussion of Homily X regarding Anglo-Saxon seals and charter validation in Jane Roberts, “What Did Anglo-Saxon Seals Seal When?” in *The Power of Words: Essays in Lexicography, Lexicology and Semantics in Honour of Christian J. Kay*, ed. Graham D. Caie, Carole Hough, and Irené Wotherspoon (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 131–57.

14 Smith, *Land and Book*, 138, notes that “The word *frumgewrit* appears only in this homily and it may have been coined specifically for this passage.”

suggests that the elect were previously “written in heaven,” but are now *themselves* inscribed. This “mark” perhaps refers to the baptismal *sphragis* (“seal”) – the sign of the cross received by the Christian following baptism that figuratively seals the individual for heaven¹⁵ – but here the emphasis is on the relationship between the inscription and the inscribed. The homilist counters the erasure from the divine charter with the visible marking of the saved, who not only are written into heaven by Christ, but embody their salvation through bearing it as an inscribed, legible mark that signifies their identity among the elect. The celestial record of the saved is thus given a direct association with the individual body and the preservation of identity, even after death; like the inscribable surface of the charter, the person who is marked may be “read” as one among the saved, drawing a parallel between the inscription and the personhood of the individual.¹⁶

This relationship between the inscription of one’s name and one’s personhood in the afterlife is the subject of a prayer preserved in British Library MS Arundel 155, an early eleventh-century collection of forty prayers with interlinear glosses in Old English that follow a Roman psalter.¹⁷ Under the heading “Alia” on fol. 173b, the fourteenth prayer reads:

I ask you, lo, merciful Savior Christ, that you write my name in the book of eternal life and let it never be deleted into oblivion, but may it be held in eternal remembrance through you, our Lord himself.¹⁸

By positioning the *liber vitae* written by Christ as the equivalent of “eternal memory,” this prayer links writing the dead with the memory of God, in a similar way as Vercelli Homily V. The petitioner also extends the metaphors of inscription to include erasure from Christ’s book as tantamount to oblivion.¹⁹ To be

15 This mark of the saved is referred to in several Anglo-Saxon texts, including poetry; for example, *The Dream of the Rood* lines 117–18 and *Andreas* lines 1337b–38a, which has been read as Andreas’ bearing of the baptismal *sphragis*, a sign that is feared by demons; see Thomas D. Hill, “The Sphragis as Apotropaic Sign: *Andreas* 1334–44,” *Anglia* 101 (1983): 147–51.

16 This mark also identifies the elect as distinct from both those bearing the “mark” (*character*) of the Beast (Rev. 13:16–17; 14:9–11; 19:20; 20:4) and the damned whose sins recorded in the devil’s book outweigh any recorded good deeds, as described by Bede in the vision of Fursa; see Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) (hereafter cited as C&M), III.19 (268–76).

17 See no. 135 in N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), and no. 306 in Helmut Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001).

18 Ferdinand Holthausen, “Altenglische Interlinearversionen lateinischer Gebete und Beichten,” *Anglia* 65 (1941): 236–37.

19 This juxtaposition of writing and erasing with respect to one’s remembrance and fate in the afterlife has a compelling parallel in Anglo-Saxon legal documents, in which those who alter the wishes or intentions expressed in the document are threatened with damnation. Simon Keynes notes a number of Anglo-Saxon charters that include the

inscribed in the book is to secure one's identity in heaven; to be erased from this book is to be consigned to an eternity of oblivion, with one's identity blotted out from God's memory.

Memorial books and *libri vitae*

The conceptual link between inscribing identity and remembering the dead finds its most tangible expression in Anglo-Saxon England in the compilation of memorial books and lists that record the names of the dead, sometimes placed alongside the names of yet-living members of the community who wished to be remembered after they themselves died. Such records took the form of obits, necrologies, and calendar entries in service books to record a person's date of death; marginal notations of the deceased in martyrologies or gospel books; and, finally, individual books compiled specifically to keep the names of the dead, known broadly as memorial books (*libri memoriales*) and books of life (*libri vitae*).²⁰ Compiled and maintained by religious communities, these lists would include members of that community and others around it, as well as prominent laypeople, friends, and benefactors with whom a religious house had entered into confraternity. Those from outside the religious community would often have their names recorded for the remembrance and prayer of the community in exchange for a donation, perhaps bequeathing land or moveable wealth to the monastery; ample evidence of such gift-giving "as a comfort to the soul" or "for the soul's need" survives in wills and charters of the period.²¹ These memorial lists formed an integral part of Anglo-Saxon liturgical commemoration, as the recorded names would be placed on the altar or read aloud when the dead were remembered in the daily services of the religious community, thereby aiding in the salvation of those named. Far from simply recording a community's benefactors or acting as a reminder to pray, these

threat of being removed from Christ's *liber vitae*; see Simon Keynes, ed., *Liber Vitae of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey, Winchester: British Library Stowe 944, together with Leaves from British Library Cotton Vespasian A. VIII and British Library Cotton Titus D. XXVII. EEMF 26* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1996), 52. Similar curses are found in Anglo-Saxon wills, many of which warn that damnation will come to anyone who alters the bequest; see Brenda Danet and Bryna Bogoch, "'Whoever Alters This, May God Turn His Face from Him on the Day of Judgment': Curses in Anglo-Saxon Legal Documents," *The Journal of American Folklore* 105 (1992): 132–65.

20 A useful discussion of these terms, from the origins of commemoration in the early church through the early Middle Ages, is found in McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, 90–101. Regarding the terms "obituary" and "necrology," see also K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, "Testimonies of the Living Dead: The Martyrology-Necrology and the Necrology in the Chapter-Book of Mont-Saint-Michel (Avranches, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 214)," in *The Durham Liber Vitae and Its Context*, ed. David W. Rollason et al. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2004), 169–70.

21 See Arnold Angenendt, "How Was a Confraternity Made? The Evidence of Charters," in *The Durham Liber Vitae and Its Context*, 207–19. See also *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, ed. and trans. Dorothy Whitelock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930) and the recent study of the social aspect of Anglo-Saxon vernacular wills by Linda Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making in Anglo-Saxon England* (York: York Medieval Press, 2011).

lists symbolically figure the salvation of those inscribed: such texts served as tangible, earthly versions of the celestial *liber vitae*. The function of such a commemorative text is manifold; as Simon Keynes remarks,

The book would constitute the corporate memory of a religious community; it would give expression to the community's sense of its own identity; and it would reflect the community's place in secular and ecclesiastical society. Above all, however, the book would serve as an earthly counterpart of the heavenly "Book of Life" – and inclusion in the one could be regarded as a stage towards inclusion in the other.²²

In this way, the salvation of those written into a given community's *liber vitae* – even if their names were inscribed while they were yet living – was prefigured by their physical inscription on the page, as the inscription itself inspired prayers for the dead in order to secure that salvation. The recording of a name thus counted that individual as a member of that religious community and, through the individual's verbal and textual inclusion in religious services, prayers, and memorial inscriptions, anticipated his or her inclusion in the community of the saved at Judgment. The identities of those within a religious community and their relationships of confraternity are physically transferred from their previous, living interactions (while in the body) to a collection of inked names on parchment; the grouping of names does not simply express "the community's sense of its own identity," but physically embodies that community by bringing together the names of those previously connected to that community and imitating (and inventing) with ink and parchment both their presence and their proximity as members of the saved. In effect, the confraternity lists and memorial books serve as reliquaries of the relationships between the dead, both long ago and lately deceased, even as they mediate between the dead and the living members who pray for their souls. These memorial texts were thus not simply evidence of relationships within and without a given Anglo-Saxon religious community, but a means by which these social relationships could be engineered within a text that emulates Christ's *liber vitae*.

There are only a handful of extant Anglo-Saxon lists of the remembered dead (compared to the wealth of liturgical texts for commemoration on the Continent),²³ but references to these compilations by Anglo-Saxon authors such as Bede suggest that many more were produced in this period than survive.²⁴ The

22 Keynes, *Liber Vitae of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey*, 50.

23 See Dieter Geuenich, "A Survey of the Early Medieval Confraternity Books from the Continent," in *The Durham Liber Vitae and Its Context*, 141–47. It should be noted that Anglo-Saxon entries are quite common in *libri vitae* from the Continent; see Simon Keynes, "The *Liber Vitae* of the New Minster, Winchester," in *The Durham Liber Vitae and Its Context*, 152.

24 For example, Bede requests to be included in the register at Lindisfarne and in the prayers of the community there in his *Prologus* of the *Vita Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Beda*,

eightth-century letters of Lul and Boniface also indicate that religious houses would regularly keep and exchange names of their recently departed members and such “lists of those in confraternity with a religious house became well established in the eighth century.”²⁵ Keynes hypothesizes that if these early records of the dead were initially written and kept “in the blank spaces of a gospel-book or inscribed on a diptych kept on the altar, it would have seemed desirable, sooner or later, to re-organise the records in the form of a special *liber memorialis* [memorial book], which by scriptural analogy might be called a *liber vitae* [book of life].”²⁶ In England, two compiled *libri vitae* survive from before the Norman Conquest: one is the Durham *Liber Vitae* (British Library, MS Cotton Domitian A. vii), which was perhaps kept in the mid-ninth century by the community of St. Cuthbert at Lindisfarne, at Chester-le-Street in the tenth century, and at Durham in the eleventh century.²⁷ The other is the New Minster *Liber Vitae* (British Library, MS Stowe 944), later kept at Hyde Abbey in Winchester, which includes records that predate its compilation in 1031 as well as many later additions.

Produced shortly after Ælfwine became abbot of New Minster,²⁸ the New Minster *Liber Vitae* indicates the liturgical use and efficacy of “writing the dead” through both text and images. It opens with a well-known frontispiece (Stowe 944, fol. 6r) showing Queen Emma and King Cnut donating a golden altar cross for the altar at the New Minster, followed by an extended scene of judgment on folios 6v and 7r. These images at once foreground and illustrate the function of the *liber vitae* they precede, offering both a present and a future context for the names of the dead recorded within it. The donation image is a multilayered scene organized around the large, central golden cross, with Emma and Cnut and two angels on

in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*, trans. and ed. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge, 1940; repr. New York, 1969), 144–46. Obits were also kept in early Anglo-Saxon monasteries; in *HE* IV.14, Bede refers to a priest in Selsey (Sussex) whose calendar (*annale*) included the death date of King Oswald, who had appeared to a boy in that community on the anniversary of Oswald's death.

25 See Keynes, *Liber Vitae of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey*, 50.

26 Ibid. On the confluence of these terms, McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, 92, remarks that “the *libri memoriales* were often referred to in the early middle ages as *libri vitae*, in deliberate evocation of the heavenly ‘book of life’ in which the names of the saved were supposedly recorded.”

27 See Jan Gerchow, “The Origins of the Durham *Liber Vitae*,” in *The Durham Liber Vitae and Its Context*, 45–61.

28 Ælfwine was dean of the New Minster in the 1020s and was the abbot from 1031 until his death in November 1057. Catherine Karkov discusses Ælfwine's involvement in the production of the Prayerbook (BL, Cotton Titus D.xvii and xxvi) and the New Minster *Liber Vitae* in her “Abbot Ælfwine and the Sign of the Cross,” in *Cross and Cruciform in the Anglo-Saxon World: Studies to Honor the Memory of Timothy Reuter*, ed. Sarah Larratt Keefer, Karen Louise Jolly, and Catherine E. Karkov (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2010), 103–32. Ælfwine's Prayerbook is another example of an eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon commemorative text, as it also includes a series of obits in its calendar; see Keynes, *Liber Vitae of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey*, 118–21.

either side of it, Christ in a mandorla (flanked by the Virgin and St. Peter) above the cross, and below, an architectural portico with a monk filling each of seven niches. Books factor prominently in this scene, as both Christ and the centrally positioned monk at the bottom of the page hold an open volume. Karkov remarks that “The open book held by the monk directly beneath the cross is this book [i.e., the New Minster *Liber Vitae*], and is an earthly reflection of the Book of Life held by Christ in Majesty at the top of the page,” and that the yellow tinting of both Christ’s book and the cross show their similar “heavenly nature.”²⁹ This image blends several moments in time, layering the royal bequest of the altar cross at the New Minster, the monks’ use of the New Minster *Liber Vitae* (for which this folio is a frontispiece), and Christ’s opening of the celestial *liber vitae* at Judgment. That Emma and Cnut are included in this *liber vitae* is made clear by the writing of their names in capitals around the cross – “Queen Ælfgifu” (the Anglo-Saxon name of Emma) and “King Cnut” – which serve as both labels for their portraits here and the recording of their names in the book for commemoration. By illustrating the donation of the cross, this image inscribes the act that earned the royal couple a privileged place in the monks’ *liber vitae* and thus suggests their inclusion in Christ’s celestial book.³⁰

The illustration of the seven monks at the bottom of the frontispiece further suggests the function of the New Minster *Liber Vitae*: the monks who actively add to the list of names in the book also have a particular role in the provision of salvation for those who are included in their book. An explanation of the intended use for the *liber vitae* and its part in the salvation of those written within it is provided in a brief preface, on fols. 13r–v, that precedes the list of names (which starts on fol. 14r):

And may the names be entered here of all those who commend themselves to its prayers and fraternity, in order that there may be a commemoration of them every day, in the holy solemnities of Mass or in the harmonies of psalmody. And may the names themselves be presented by the sub-deacon every day before the holy altar at the Morrow or principal Mass, and may they be read out by him in the sight of the Most High, as time permits. And, after the offering of the oblation to God, placed on the holy altar at the right hand of the principal priest who is celebrating Mass, during the mysteries of the sacred Mass, may they be most humbly commended to Almighty God. So

29 Karkov, “Abbot Ælfwine,” 117.

30 The consequences of having one’s name included – or not – in Christ’s celestial *liber vitae* are illustrated in the scenes of judgment that continue from the procession of the saved on fol. 6v to the three-tiered image on fol. 7r. A central panel shows St. Peter and a devil each pulling at the arms of a young boy, whose fate is being determined by the contents of the books held by an angel on the left and by this demon on the right, demonstrating the use of the celestial books mentioned in Revelation 20:12, noted above. Those whose names are not written in the book of life – which the angel here holds – are cast into hell (Rev. 20:15), which is shown in the bottom panel, in which the Archangel Michael locks the door on the souls tortured and stuffed into a hell mouth.

that, just as commemoration of them is made on earth, so too in that life, by the bounty of Him who alone knows how all are, or are to be, there, may the glory be augmented of those who are of greater merit in heaven, and may the cause be smoothed, in the hidden judgements, of those who are of lesser merit. Rejoice and be glad, because your names are written in heaven. [...] Amen.³¹

This preface asks that the book be physically present at Mass daily and that the names be read aloud, presented by the sub-deacon and then placed on the altar so that those included in it might be commended to God. While the performative aspect of commemoration as a part of the Mass demonstrates the role of this book, it is significant that the reading of the names is given the mitigating phrase “as time permits,” which implies that the names need not be audible for the Mass to be effective for the dead. Perhaps anticipating a time when there would be too many names to read them all aloud during Mass, the preface suggests that it is the names’ presence on the page and their physical placement “during the mysteries of the sacred Mass” that commends the dead to God.³² That is, although the names go unread by human eyes and voices, the contents of the book are known by God.

The New Minster *Liber Vitae* demonstrates how the concept of inscription in an earthly book is linked with the memory of God, whose remembrance of the dead is here made synonymous with the inscribed contents of the *liber vitae*. The preface asks that God – who alone knows all – would view those inscribed in this book with mercy, supported by the monks’ prayers and Masses, which are spoken in close proximity to the written names. Those inscribed in this earthly book are thus anticipated to be likewise written in the celestial book, which it imitates, a notion reinforced by the use of the same biblical reference discussed above in Vercelli Homily V: to be written in this physical *liber vitae* is to be included among the elect whose names “are written in heaven.”

More than simply a record of the devoted dead, the Anglo-Saxon lists of names in *libri vitae* were considered physical place holders for the elect in heaven. Such books certainly denoted a religious house’s social and political affiliations in their inclusion of wealthy aristocrats and kings who had been benefactors of their community. But in imitating Christ’s *liber vitae*, these lists symbolize the preservation of a person’s identity from oblivion and his or her inclusion as a part of the broader community of the saved. Since no single *liber vitae* on earth could fully encapsulate its counterpart in heaven, these lists create communities of the saved on a local level, which are understood to be representations of the larger inscription of all the saved written into heaven. In this way, the act of written commemoration invests

31 Walter de Gray Birch, ed., *Liber Vitae: Register and Martyrology of New Minster and Hyde Abbey, Winchester* (London: Simpkin, 1892), 12. Translation from Keynes, *Liber Vitae of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey*, 83.

32 Many *libri vitae* are laid out in columns, but the everyday use and continued expansion by multiple scribes in order to make use of every blank space on the parchment result in the obscuring of this order. At this point, not only time but also legibility would be an issue. For a discussion of layout, see Gerchow, “Origins,” 46–47.

in a complex series of mediations in which the book itself (or even the image of a book) mediates the physical presence of the dead in the earthly community, even as this object itself stands in for the intangible, celestial *liber vitae*.

Salvation written in stone: Anglo-Saxon memorial inscriptions

Inscribed names of the dead also appear on commemorative monuments that preserve a person's identity for remembrance and prayer. Anglo-Saxon funerary and memorial sculpture survives only in stone, although there is evidence that wooden grave markers might have been common; these stone objects range from upright stone slabs inscribed with a simple cross to more elaborate "name-stones," which bear the name of the deceased, often in the quadrants of an incised cross.³³ More elaborate inscribed markers include a variety of Latin and Old English memorial formulas, which indicate who is buried there, name the stone's patron, or request the viewer's prayers for the soul of the deceased. There are also notable shifts in the patronage and decoration of these stones over time: the earliest are found near religious communities – likely commemorating members and benefactors of their own houses – while later monuments commemorate lay patrons and their families within this religious context. One might expect that a stone bearing a cross and a personal name, or a name as part of a memorial formula, would naturally be a gravestone – as is expected in modern funerary practices – but that is only true of some of the surviving Anglo-Saxon memorial stones. Only a few grave markers have been discovered *in situ*, but weathering on several Anglo-Saxon monuments (indicating a lengthy display outdoors) suggests that they, too, may have formerly been positioned on the ground specifically to denote the location of the buried body. Other monuments seem to have been set up away from the body at another prominent location, either within a church or at a visible spot in the community, whilst retaining their function as a visible, physical sign that identifies the deceased. In some cases, these stone carvings – including both memorials and gravestones – showcase images in addition to words to commemorate the deceased, as seen in the occasional secular "portraits" on Anglo-Saxon cross-shafts. A far rarer category of Anglo-Saxon funerary inscriptions includes those which appear to have been buried with the body of the deceased, a circumstance that necessarily alters both the intended readership and the function of the inscription with respect to the dead.

In each of these cases, the use of inscription in stone offers a legible point of reference for the dead; everything from the location of a commemorative monument to its text and decoration offers a particular, idealized message about the deceased, including his or her social, cultural, and religious connections. Perhaps because modern populations in the West are accustomed to seeing inscriptions on gravestones, the inscribed texts and references to writing in funerary contexts from the early Middle Ages are frequently assumed to be strictly pragmatic. As a result,

33 See Richard Bailey, *England's Earliest Sculptors* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996), 23 and Hadley, *Death in Medieval England*, 128.

this form of writing the dead is often overlooked, along with its connections to other commemorative texts produced in this period. But in the context of death and the remembrance of the dead in Anglo-Saxon England, the use of inscription on commemorative monuments is both pragmatic and symbolic. It records (and thus preserves) information about the dead while also suggesting the nature of the remembrance of the deceased individual. While the physical body is dissolved and out of sight, the inscription comes to embody the identity of the dead in a more permanent form and projects his or her continued presence in memory both here – in the prayers of the living – and in the hereafter.

While there are no clear Anglo-Saxon descriptions of the placement and function of contemporary grave markers, these monuments are, like the memorial texts described above, meant to inscribe the identities of the deceased in the memory of the living. The function of these stone monuments is therefore identical to the Anglo-Saxons' lists of the dead and compiled *libri vitae*, since the stones also serve as a mnemonic for the dead and replace their absent bodies with a tangible, physical object that maintains the identity through writing. In fact, many of these funerary monuments can be read as provocative imitations of books and manuscript pages in stone, thereby combining the powerful image of Christian remembrance in the *liber vitae* with a material that carries connotations of eternity for all who encounter it.

All of the earliest Anglo-Saxon memorial stones are distinctly Christian, having been produced primarily for members of religious communities. Often employing both roman and runic script, these stones are some of the earliest runic inscriptions in Anglo-Saxon England. Among the earliest inscriptions for the dead are those from monastic communities in Northumbria – namely Billingham, Birtley, Hartlepool, Hexham, Lindisfarne, and Monkwearmouth – which are dated to as early as the mid-seventh century.³⁴ While there is a tradition of carving runic memorials in pre-conversion Scandinavia,³⁵ there is very little runic material of any kind in

34 Several of the stones bearing personal names or memorial inscriptions at Hartlepool are dated to the mid-seventh to eighth century; see Hartlepool nos. 2–8, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Vol. 1: County Durham and Northumberland*, ed. Rosemary Cramp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), hereafter CASSS, cited by volume number.

35 Stone epigraphy is attested in early medieval Scandinavia from the fourth century on and may have originated from contact with late Roman gravestone inscriptions around the Rhine; see Terje Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions*, trans. Betsy van der Hoek (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2005), 35. Unlike in Anglo-Saxon England, where the carving of memorial inscriptions on stone appears along with (and likely as a result of) conversion, raising memorial stones with carved runes was customary for Scandinavian pagans; however, these early Viking Age rune stones were not common and the bulk of such stones were produced in the period of conversion from the later Viking Age through the eleventh century, an upsurge that many attribute to the increased use of writing that came with Christian conversion. See, for example, Magnus Källström, "Clerical or Lay Literacy in Late Viking Age Uppland? The Evidence of Local Rune Carvers and Their Work," in *Epigraphic Literacy and Christian Identity: Modes of Written Discourse in the Newly Christian European North*, ed. Kristel Zilmer and Judith Jesch (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 30. Regarding the formulaic language on Scandinavian memorials, see Birgit Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 146–54. The

Anglo-Saxon England prior to the conversion to Christianity, after which there is an explosion in the use of epigraphical runes, which often appear in tandem with (or in equal status to) roman script.³⁶ Far from harboring the pagan or magical associations often assumed for this script, the Anglo-Saxons appear to have repurposed their native alphabet following conversion.³⁷ David N. Parsons argues that the Anglo-Saxon church was responsible for the spread of runic literacy, and runes were taught alongside roman script: “The new religion evidently gave a new impetus to the use of runic literacy, and the great majority of surviving Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions are overtly Christian in character.”³⁸ In a similar vein, Elisabeth Okasha remarks regarding the audience of these name-stones,

It may be assumed that prayer was desired for those named, even in cases where there is no specific request for it. In view of the lack of literacy amongst much of the population of the region at this period, it is not altogether clear to whom the request for prayer was directed. It is usually assumed that it was intended for a literate person, perhaps a priest or monk, who could read it aloud to others.³⁹

Although a lack of reading knowledge of either Latin or Old English would prevent most Northumbrian laypeople in this period from reading the names themselves, the inscription could have been read aloud – a means of reading gravestone

direction of influence on commemorative traditions between Scandinavia and England has been the subject of debate; see Katherine Holman’s discussion of runic inscriptions on the Isle of Man in *Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions in the British Isles: Their Historical Context* (Trondheim: Tapir, 1996), 169; Magnus Olsen, “De norrøne runeinnskrifter,” in *Runorna*, ed. Otto von Friesen (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers, 1933), 83–113; and Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions*, 134.

36 For discussions of the scarcity of evidence for the early use of runes in Anglo-Saxon England, see René Derolez, “Runic Literacy Among the Anglo-Saxons,” in *Britain 400–600: Language and History*, ed. Alfred Bammesberger and Alfred Wollmann (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1990), 397–436, and R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd ed. (1999; repr. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2006), 21–29, in which Page notes the stark differences in the distribution of pre-650 and post-650 runic material. See also John Hines, “The Runic Inscriptions of Early Anglo-Saxon England,” in *Britain 400–600*, 437–55.

37 The magical or pagan associations of Anglo-Saxon runes have been questioned by Page in *Introduction to English Runes*, 12–15. See also Page, “Anglo-Saxon Runes and Magic,” in *Runes and Runic Inscriptions: Collected Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Viking Runes* by R. I. Page, ed. David Parsons (1964; repr. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1998), 105–25 and Christine E. Fell, “Runes and Semantics,” in *Old English Runes and Their Continental Background*, ed. Alfred Bammesberger (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1991), 195–229.

38 David N. Parsons, *Recasting the Runes: The Reform of the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc*, *Runrön 14* (Uppsala: Institutionen för nordiska språk, Uppsala universitet, 1999), 23. Page also suggests that “the Anglo-Saxon rune-stone may be the church’s invention, derived from the memorial cross with roman inscription,” *Introduction to English Runes*, 35.

39 Elisabeth Okasha, “Name-Stones,” *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 20 (2002): 544–51, at 545.

inscriptions suggested by Bede in his discussion of the epitaph of King Cædwalla of Wessex⁴⁰ – and its text therefore made accessible to the unlettered.⁴¹

Most of the Northumbrian name-stones follow a particular visual formula in their layout: they feature a large, inscribed cross that fills the face of the stone with an inscription – including the name of the deceased in runic and/or roman script, and occasionally other inscribed symbols, such as *alpha* and *omega* – in the quadrants of the cross.⁴² Some of these name-stones are rectangular in shape, while others (especially those from Lindisfarne) have straight sides with rounded tops (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Some name-stones include two names, occasionally with one in roman and one in runic script.⁴³ The doubled-names and script-mixing have been interpreted variously, including their indication of a mixed-literacy readership, an expression of the multilingual sign from Luke 23:38 that labeled Christ on the cross, or as a record of the name of an individual before and after entry into religious life.⁴⁴ While varying widely in size and thickness, these name-stones are all designed for upright display, either propped against the wall of a church or partially buried in the ground to stand up over a grave. They are all meant to be seen by passersby, with the exception of a few inscribed pieces in this group that appear to have been deliberately buried with the dead whose names they (presumably) bear.

40 See Bede, *HE* V.7 (C&M, 468–72).

41 The reading aloud of objects' inscriptions such that "readers lend their voices to the inscribed objects" is addressed in Thomas A. Bredehoft, "First-Person Inscriptions and Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England," *ASSAH* 9 (1996): 104. Okasha alternatively addresses this idea of reading and literacy, pointing out that "Such texts [i.e., those inscribed on memorial stones] certainly seem to be expecting a literate audience, although not necessarily a large literate audience: one person could read aloud an inscribed text to others and he or she would not need to be very learned in Latin to translate *ora pro* into Old English." "Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England: The Evidence from Inscriptions," *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 8 (1995): 71. Regarding literacy and funerary inscriptions, see Mark A. Handley, *Death, Society and Culture: Inscriptions and Epitaphs in Gaul and Spain, AD 300–750*, BAR International Series 1135 (Oxford: BAR, 2003), 173.

42 The *alpha* and *omega* often appear in the upper quadrants of the cross inscribed on the memorial stone; see, for example, Billingham 13, Hartlepool 1, and Hartlepool 6, *CASSS* 1. To this list could be added Hartlepool 2, which – like Hartlepool 1 – has a name inscribed in runes in the lower quadrants, but is so weathered that any inscription in the upper quadrants is no longer visible. These "apocalyptic letters" refer to Revelation 22:13; see Handley, *Death, Society and Culture*, 173; and Christine E. Fell, "Anglo-Saxon England: A Three-Script Community?," *Runnön 9: Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on Runes and Runic Inscriptions*, ed. James E. Knirk (Uppsala: Institutionen för nordiska språk, Uppsala universitet, 1994), 130. The connection of the *alpha* and *omega* on the stones to resurrection theology is further discussed by Christine Maddern, *Raising the Dead: Early Medieval Name Stones in Northumbria* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 145–55.

43 See, for example, the *CASSS* 1 entries for Hartlepool 4, and 5, Lindisfarne 24–28, and 30.

44 See Fell, "A Three-Script Community?" 129; Michelle P. Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality, and the Scribe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 228; and Rosemary Cramp's discussion of Monkwearmouth 4 in *CASSS* 1.



FIGURE 1.1 Face A, Hartlepool 1 (CASSS 1: *County Durham and Northumberland*), alpha, omega above; “Hildeþryb” below in runes. © The Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University (UK), photographer T. Middlemass.



FIGURE 1.2 Face A, Lindisfarne 24 (CASSS 1: *County Durham and Northumberland*), “Osgyð” written out in both runes (above) and roman script. © The Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University (UK), photographer T. Middlemass.

These inscribed memorial stones have been separated by Okasha into three narrow groups: gravestones (in cases where the monument has been discovered *in situ* over a grave); commemorative stones that do not denote the location of the buried body; and lapidary *libri vitae*.⁴⁵ The suggestion that the stones are connected to *libri vitae* was first made by Rev. M. Moloney regarding a set of similar Irish memorial slabs at Toureen Peacaun – a notion Okasha and others have applied to the Northumbrian name-stones.⁴⁶ Certainly, what is perhaps most striking about the Northumbrian inscriptions is their strong resemblance to Anglo-Saxon manuscript arts, particularly in this same region of England. Several of the Northumbrian communities that produced these name-stones also had active scriptoria in the seventh and eighth centuries, and the epigraphical script used on these stone inscriptions has been linked to the book scripts in this area. Michelle P. Brown has suggested that the display scripts on the name-stones as well as other artifacts from Lindisfarne parallel the “rune-influenced angular display capitals of the Lindisfarne Gospels,” and some of the stones also showcase a half-uncial script related to that of the manuscript.⁴⁷ Éamonn Ó Carragáin, too, in his broader study of the crosses of Anglo-Saxon England, has likened these Northumbrian name-stones to books; he remarks in passing,

We know that, in the context of prayers for the living and dead, particular Anglo-Saxon monasteries experimented with a variety of visual ways of recalling the scriptural Book of Life, of which liturgical diptychs were a symbolic image. For example, at Hartlepool, the names of deceased members of the community were inscribed on stones specifically cut to resemble books: it would appear that individual members of that community were regularly accompanied in the grave by their own imperishable *liber vitae*.⁴⁸

45 Elisabeth Okasha, “Memorial Stones or Grave-Stones?” in *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: Approaches to Current Scholarship and Teaching*, ed. Paul Cavill (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 91–101.

46 See Moloney, “Beccan’s Hermitage in Aherlow: The Riddle of the Slabs,” *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* 9.3 (1964): 99–107. See also Elisabeth Okasha and Katherine Forsyth, *Early Christian Inscriptions of Munster: A Corpus of the Inscribed Stones (Excluding Ogham)* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), 325–26, and Okasha, “Name-Stones,” 546.

47 See Michelle P. Brown, “Building Babel: The Architecture of the Early Written Western Vernaculars,” in *Omnia Disce: Medieval Studies in Memory of Leonard Boyle*, O. P., ed. Anne J. Duggan, Joan Greatrex, and Brenda Bolton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 114; see also Brown, *Lindisfarne Gospels*, 228–29, and 331–45. R. I. Page has also argued that the epigraphers’ style on stone monuments such as the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses (as well as on objects such as Cuthbert’s coffin and the Franks Casket) are indebted to styles of the local monastic scriptoria; see Page, “Roman and Runic on St. Cuthbert’s Coffin,” in *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to AD 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, David W. Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1989), 257–66.

48 Éamonn Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood: Liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the Dream of the Rood Tradition* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2005), 41–42.

Modifying this connection between the Northumbrian name-stones and *libri vitae*, Christine Maddern suggests that these monuments – many of which were painted and decorated – “were intended to recall manuscript pages, particularly decorated ones.”⁴⁹ In other words, the stones do not necessarily represent whole codices, but *pages* of books. The layout of these stones specifically resembles the carpet pages of contemporary northern gospel books, such as the Lindisfarne Gospels.⁵⁰ With an inscribed cross that both fills a framed plane and intersects with the border at the edge, these name-stones represent a plainer version of the elaborate interlace that fills the carpet pages. As such, they emulate manuscript pages in not only their script, as Brown has suggested, but also their layout and form. Since pages of gospel books could serve as *libri vitae*, as noted above, this resemblance to books is particularly significant to the name-stones’ function as lapidary *libri vitae*. This resemblance may also be key to understanding the stones’ liturgical function: each stone emulates the page of a book that would be present on the altar during the liturgy. The stones therefore evoke the physical presence of the dead in the specific context of a service that would give aid to their souls. Through being encoded with the image and script of contemporary manuscript arts, these funerary monuments evoke a connection between the written dead and the book as both a receptacle for remembrance used within that community to recall the dead and a metaphor of their salvation in the next life. These stones emulate the form and function of memorial books used within these religious communities to aid the salvation of the dead, and represent the inscribed individuals’ anticipation of their being written in Christ’s *liber vitae*.

As an object that implicitly requests prayer for the dead and resembles the memorial lists kept at the monastery, the name-stones clearly participate in the liturgical commemoration of the dead in early medieval Northumbria. While heavy weathering indicates that several of the surviving name-stones were kept outdoors, several are entirely unworn; in some cases, the stones were unweathered because they were under ground with the corpse (as is thought to have been the case with some of the Hartlepool name-stones), either intentionally interred or appearing

49 Maddern, *Raising the Dead*, 225; see also 143–45, and 239–41. Maddern further suggests that the round-topped stones from Lindisfarne have an additional connection to doorways in seventh- and eighth-century Irish church architecture. With Christ referred to as the “door” in the Gospel of John and in Revelation, these stones call to mind the salvation through Christ and the coming of the Last Judgment; see Maddern, *Raising the Dead*, 242–43.

50 The particular cross forms on some of these Northumbrian name-stones have been compared to the “metalwork” type of cross found in Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts, such as the Lindisfarne Gospels, fol. 2v [...], and the Lichfield Gospels, p. 218”; see entry for Monkwearmouth 4, CASSS 1. Other Anglo-Saxon stone sculptures have been compared with the carpet pages of northern manuscripts; see, for example, the discussion of a late eighth- to early ninth-century grave-cover from Kirkdale (Yorkshire), traditionally known as the “King Ethelwald stone”; CASSS 3: *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, ed. James Lang (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 162.

so because they had sunk into the grave.⁵¹ But in other cases, where the unworn stones were not discovered entombed, they may have been kept indoors at the monastery, perhaps serving as stationary memorials at the altar that ensure the continuing presence of the dead at Mass.⁵² Likewise, the name-stones that were fixed outside or used as grave markers in the churchyard may have served as votive stations where prayer for the dead was carried out, each stone serving as a makeshift altar.

The emulation of codices in stone is also found outside the standard format of the Northumbrian name-stones: although it post-dates the Northumbrian stones by roughly three centuries, the Newent funerary tablet from Gloucestershire takes the imitation of the book to an even greater extreme (see Figure 1.3).⁵³ Discovered interred with a skeleton several feet below the surface of a churchyard, this eleventh-century slab with the names of the four gospel-writers and “Edred” (presumably the name of the deceased man) carved on its edges has been identified by Victoria Thompson not simply as a “tablet” but as “a stone rendition of a gospel book.”⁵⁴ Having been buried with Edred’s corpse, this “stone gospel book” was not used for the commemoration of the dead by the living, but it nonetheless shows the use of the gospel book as a viable site for inscribing the dead with the aim of ensuring their salvation. The two broad faces depict Christ as the central figure: face A has a crucifixion scene with Christ on a large cross that fills much of the plane, and face C is a Last Judgment scene featuring Christ as a large, central figure in priestly attire, holding a crosier in one hand and a long-shafted cross in the other, and seemingly trampling human figures below his feet.⁵⁵ Over the right shoulder of

51 There is some debate over whether the Hartlepool stones found buried were “pillow stones” (which are often uninscribed, small stones placed under the skull) or simply inscribed stones buried with or over the heads of the corpse; see Okasha, “The Inscribed Stones from Hartlepool,” in *Northumbria’s Golden Age*, ed. Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), 113–25.

52 For example, Billingham 13, CASSS 1 – which has a somewhat different layout from the name-stones at Hartlepool, Lindisfarne, and Monkwearmouth – is unworn and was discovered during the restoration of the parish church; see Okasha, *Hand-List of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 52–53. See also Monkwearmouth 4, CASSS 1.

53 See Newent 2, CASSS 10, *The Western Midlands: Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire*, ed. Richard Bryant with Michael Hare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 236–39.

54 Victoria Thompson, *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2004), 90. The use of book-like features on Newent 2 was first pointed out by George Zamecki, “The Newent Funerary Tablet,” *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 72 (1953): 49–55, who suggested that the raised circles on face A of the tablet were probably skeuomorphic rivet holes that were used to affix a metal or ivory panel onto the boards of a book (52). The raised lettering used all over the stone also suggests the use of repoussé metalwork or ivory exemplars, possibly also drawn from book-making practices; see Zamecki, “Newent Funerary Tablet,” 52–53; CASSS 10, 239; and Bailey, *England’s Earliest Sculptors*, 122.

55 Face C has also been interpreted as the Harrowing of Hell in Elizabeth Coatsworth, “Late Pre-Conquest Sculptures with the Crucifixion South of the Humber,” in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. Barbara Yorke (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1988), 180–81, and 191. The presence of an armed figure (interpreted as St. Michael),



FIGURE 1.3 Face C, Newent Memorial Tablet (Newent 2, *CASSS* 10: *The Western Midlands*): a large figure of Christ surrounded by figures at the Last Judgment; the name “EDRED” here labels one of these figures in the upper-left corner. Photograph © Richard Bryant; used with permission.

Christ is a supine figure and the name “Edred” appears a second time, here carved in raised letters above this figure who reaches out with one hand to touch the cross held by Christ. Thompson, who reads this stone book in the context of mid-eleventh-century funeral rites, remarks that “Here, surely, we have a Christian grave—good for use in another life, a very personal object and one of great sophistication.”⁵⁶ But I would suggest that the book is not meant for Edred’s use in “another life” so much as it is to aid in Edred’s *entry* into that life: physically buried with his decayed body, the stone book depicts his resurrection in whole, bodily form, labeled with the word “Edred.” With his name included in a “gospel book” here figured as a memorial object, this inscription represents Edred’s inclusion in Christ’s *liber vitae*, anticipating his bodily resurrection and salvation through both an inscribed body and text, the intended readership for which was not only those

who with drawn sword “effectively divid[es] those figures who are being trampled underfoot from those who are rising upwards, would tend to support the view that this is a Last Judgment scene.” *CASSS* 10, 238.

56 Thompson, *Dying and Death*, 90.

present at the open grave of his eleventh-century burial, but also God. Since the book was buried with his corpse, it is not for human remembrance, but for that of God and the saints, who could see into the tomb.⁵⁷ The stone labels his corpse unambiguously at the resurrection and also depicts Edred in the state in which he hoped God would remember him – clinging metaphorically to the cross so that he may be counted among the saved.

A final category of stone objects inscribed as memorials are Anglo-Saxon standing crosses, which may have had a similar liturgical function to the Northumbrian name-stones. Regarding the function of Northumbrian standing crosses, John Mitchell remarks that “one of the principal uses of these stone crosses seems to have been to mark places of prayer and foci of Christian assembly in locations where there were no churches to serve as places of worship,” perhaps “sanctify[ing] spots where the eucharist could be regularly celebrated at a portable altar.”⁵⁸ While Mitchell’s argument applies to the many standing crosses that do not appear to be inscribed as memorial monuments, for those that *do* carry such commemorative inscriptions – such as the crosses and cross fragments at Bewcastle, Crowle, Urswick, Lancaster, Wycliffe, Dewsbury, Collingham, Ripon, and Thornhill – these practices situate the names of the dead in a similar physical position as a *liber vitae* used in Mass. The names are literally and physically at the altar for all forms of liturgical commemoration at that site. With the standing cross as a place of prayer and worship, the dead there inscribed in stone are made “present” in the liturgy through their close proximity to the altar and the priest who is celebrating Mass. It is also important to note that while many of the northern standing crosses were not – unlike the name-stones – intended as grave markers, such crosses did become the foci for burials.⁵⁹

In the specific case of the Bewcastle Cross, Ó Carragáin argues that this monument emulates the heavenly *liber vitae* in its inclusion of a distinct memorial inscription and personal names, all in English runes; he contends that, while the names were unlikely to have been read aloud, “if Mass was ever celebrated within sight of the west side of the Bewcastle [C]ross, the priest and congregation could make an implicit commemoration of all their benefactors (not just those actually listed on the cross) by simply glancing at the cross for a moment of silent prayer at the appropriate prayers of the Mass, for living and dead.”⁶⁰ While the runic inscriptions

57 Okasha makes the case for “divine literacy” for inscribed memorial stones in “Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England,” 71.

58 John Mitchell, “The High Cross and Monastic Strategies in Eighth-Century Northumbria,” in *New Offerings, Ancient Treasures: Studies in Medieval Art for George Henderson*, ed. Paul Binski and William Noel (Stroud: Sutton, 2001), 103–4.

59 See Hadley, *Death in Medieval England*, 128–29. Perhaps the most famous example of a standing cross as the locus for burial is the request of St. Cuthbert, recorded in Bede’s prose *Life of Cuthbert*, to be buried on Lindisfarne near the oratory and the holy cross that he himself erected; see Bede, *Life of Cuthbert* XXXVII. *Two Lives of Cuthbert*, 272.

60 Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 42. Ó Carragáin goes on to note that the use of this commemorative inscription perhaps “suggested the deeper mystery of the *Liber Vitae*, a mystery clearly recalled by the closed scroll blessed by Christ in the panel just above

on the Bewcastle Cross – which are now only partially legible – could not be read from a great distance, the monument’s function as a memorial is clear from what remains of the main inscription on the west face (face A). Below figures of John the Baptist and Christ on this face is a large flat panel with a lengthy but largely illegible runic inscription: “+This victory monument (*sigbeon*) was raised by Hwætred [and others?] in memory of [personal name(s)]. Pray [for the soul].”⁶¹ Using a “pray for...” memorial formula common on Anglo-Saxon funerary inscriptions both in Latin and Old English, the Bewcastle Cross inscription is unambiguously requesting post-mortem prayer. This memorial inscription is also accompanied by a carved figure below, which is un-haloed, wearing contemporary dress (a short tunic with a large collar), a bird perched beside him. While the identity of this figure has been debated,⁶² if it is an image of the man it commemorates, it would be an idealized image that indicates rank (e.g., falconry as an aristocratic pastime) in a way that was consistent with – or desired by – the person the memorial commemorated.⁶³ Particularly since the memorial cross refers to itself as a “victory monument,” the inscriptions carry with them the notion that this monument – as the sign of the cross – brings life and triumph over death and the dissolution of the grave. Whatever else the inscriptions on the faces of the Bewcastle Cross might once have indicated about this monument, it is clear that it had a commemorative and liturgical purpose for members of this community, singling out particular ones among them for remembrance.

From tomb to manuscript: Anglo-Saxon epitaphs

Distinct from stones that record only the name of the deceased, an inscribed epitaph categorically comprises more information, traditionally addressing its reader directly and including a self-referencing phrase (such as “Here lies...”) to denote that the text is understood to be inscribed on a gravestone.⁶⁴ Defined generically in Greek as “writing on a tomb,” the epitaph is understood as having a locative sense that

[...]. That mystery involved nothing less than the significance of each individual human life: all Christians hoped that their names would one day be found in the heavenly Scroll of Life” (43).

- 61 There is also on the north face (face D) a fillet between non-figural panels with the inscribed runes “kyniburg,” the Old English feminine personal name *Cyneburh*.
- 62 See the discussion of Bewcastle 1 in *CASSS 2, Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire-North-of-the-Sands*, ed. Richard N. Bailey and Rosemary Cramp (Oxford University Press, 1981), which argues for this image as a religious figure, *contra* Ó Carragáin, who suggests that it may even be a “royal” portrait (Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, 41).
- 63 Paul Binski discusses this distinction with respect to later medieval effigies in *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 92–115, especially 102–3.
- 64 This formulaic language for Latin epitaphs is traditional and adopted from Continental practices; regarding the ninth-century epitaph on Whitchurch 1 (Hamps.), it has been noted that “The underlying formula of the text, *hic requiescit*, is common in Christian inscriptions from the fifth c. onwards and was used elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon England.” *CASSS 4, South-East England*, ed. Dominic Tweddle, Martin Biddle, and Birthe Kjolbye-Biddle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 272.

associates this writing inherently with the grave.⁶⁵ It is an ancient commemorative genre that medieval Europe inherited from Antiquity, and while Anglo-Saxon epitaphs draw on a number of classical conventions and motifs, they also shed light on early medieval attitudes toward the dead, and the metonymic relationship between the body and the commemorative text.

Among the best surviving examples of epitaphic inscriptions is an early eighth-century sandstone slab known as Monkwearmouth 5 (see Figure 1.4). The inscription in Anglo-Saxon capitals is arranged in the quadrants of a cross and reads: “Here in the tomb lies Herebericht the priest in the body.” This beautifully



FIGURE 1.4 Face A, Monkwearmouth 5 (CASSS 1: *County Durham and Northumberland*), epitaph of Priest Herebericht. © The Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University (UK), photographer T. Middlemass.

65 See Scott L. Newstok, *Quoting Death in Early Modern England: The Poetics of Epitaphs beyond the Tomb* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2009), 46–47.

carved Latin inscription was discovered face-down in the west portico of St. Peter's in Durham, having been reused to cover a later medieval coffin.⁶⁶ It identifies Herebericht's body as the one lying beneath this slab (at least originally) with its formulaic reference to the corpse buried here (Latin *hic*).⁶⁷ Although the body is unseen, the reader is made to ponder the priest's mortal remains. As Anne Carson remarks, "No genre of verse is more profoundly concerned with seeing what is not there, and not seeing what is, than that of the epitaph. An epitaph is something placed upon a grave – [...] a body that is made into a sign. [...] The purpose of the monument is to insert a dead and vanished past into the living present."⁶⁸

Because they typically survive on parchment rather than stone, Anglo-Saxon epitaphs occupy an interesting material space between the gravestone and the *liber memorialis*, purporting to record information taken directly from the grave of a memorialized individual. The manuscript versions of these epitaphs enjoyed remarkable popularity in the early Middle Ages, as is attested by Bede's inclusion of five epitaphs in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and a ninth-century copy of Milred of Worcester's sylloge of Latin inscriptions.⁶⁹ Transferring a text that is understood to have been on the tomb – even if it never actually was so – onto the page of a manuscript generates an important rhetorical shift, not simply in the materiality of the inscription (parchment instead of stone), but in its situation and understood context in addressing its reader.⁷⁰ This new context and situation for the inherently locative nature of the epitaph – with the formulaic phrase "here lies" contextually dependent on and pointing rhetorically to the grave – results in a type of deixis. As Scott Newstok remarks regarding the early modern epitaph removed from the tombstone and situated as a literary genre, the word *here* is "a shifting word whose reference depends on the context of its utterance," and it therefore allows the literary

66 Monkwearmouth 5, CASSS 1.

67 This Latin memorial formula, "here lies," appears in part or whole on a number of Anglo-Saxon stones; see, for example, Whitby 20 (late seventh to mid eighth century; N. Yorks., CASSS 6, *Northern Yorkshire*, ed. by James Lang (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)); York Minster 22 (late seventh to early ninth century; Yorks., CASSS 3); Hexham 44 (eleventh century? Northumb., CASSS 1); Whitchurch 1 (ninth century; Hamps., CASSS 4); and Winchester 1 (eleventh century?; Hamps., CASSS 4). A much rarer Old English formula, "HER LIÐ..." is found on Winchester 6 (early eleventh century; Hamps., CASSS 4).

68 Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost: Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 73.

69 See Patrick Sims-Williams, "Milred of Worcester's Collection of Latin Epigrams and Its Continental Counterparts," *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1981): 21–38. Some scholars read these collections of epitaphs as purely literary pieces that were composed only on parchment and never actually inscribed in stone, but others read the evidence as demonstrating that, by and large, these inscriptions were actually carved; see Handley, *Death, Society and Culture*, 177.

70 The relationship between the epitaph and its reader is discussed in Catherine A. M. Clarke's chapter, "Sites of Economy: Power and Reckoning in the Poetic Epitaphs of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," in *Writing Power in Anglo-Saxon England: Texts, Hierarchies, Economies* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), 44–79.

epitaph to attain a “rhetorical weight that becomes applied in circumstances far beyond its place of origin, namely, the grave.”⁷¹ While Newstok examines this epitaphic deixis in the memorial practices following the Protestant Reformation, the interest in copying epitaphs from gravestones and circulating them on parchment was a much earlier practice in England. Copies of Anglo-Saxon epitaphs necessarily employ a form of deixis in their shift of context from an inscription on the grave to an inscription within a manuscript, situated within another text or a rhetorical situation beyond the grave where the inscription may engage with readers thousands of miles away from the buried body.

Epitaphs participate in a dialectic of absence and presence by creating a physical space for the dead that at once *acknowledges* the body’s absence and deliberately *replaces* that body with a written text. With the corpse hidden from view, the identification of the dead relies on and is embodied by the inscribed words that point to the body’s presence “here” (*hic*). This same language of “here-ness” is also used in epitaphs copied on parchment, which retain the “rhetorical weight” of the grave even though written in manuscript. As a self-referencing inscription on a unique object, a carved epitaph on an individual’s gravestone may be considered an “untransferable text,” one which loses meaning when it loses its original material context and is copied onto another surface.⁷² But because the copied epitaph yet retains the “here-ness” of the grave, I would suggest that its mnemonic quality as a text designed to preserve the dead in memory is maintained even in the parchment copy. These Anglo-Saxon epitaphs occupy a space in which the literal body (the body buried *here*) and the textual *representation* of that body (which is proclaimed by the text to be figuratively “here”) fundamentally overlap. With the word “*hic*” referring at one and the same time to the figurative unseen tomb *and* to the literal page, the epitaph brings the presence of the absent dead to the written letters.

The foremost examples of Anglo-Saxon epitaphs come from the scholar, historian, and monk, the Venerable Bede; the five funerary inscriptions in his *Ecclesiastical History* – epitaphs for Pope Gregory the Great, Augustine of Canterbury, Theodore of Tarsus, King Cædwalla of Wessex, and Bishop Wilfrid – show an acute awareness of the importance of written commemoration and the particular rhetorical situation of the epitaph as a text on the grave. For example, in his preface to the epitaph of King Cædwalla of Wessex in Rome (composed by Archbishop Crispus of Milan),⁷³ Bede ponders the reception and purpose of epitaphs:

71 Ibid., 28, 29; see also *ibid.*, 44–45.

72 See Peter Orton, “Deixis and the Untransferable Text: Anglo-Saxon Colophons, Verse-Prefaces and Inscriptions,” in *Imagining the Book*, ed. Stephen Kelly and John J. Thompson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 195–207.

73 Cædwalla’s epitaph is among those known to have been certainly carved in stone before being circulated on parchment; Colgrave and Mynors note that “The sepulchral stone on which it was carved was discovered in the sixteenth century by the builders of the present St. Peter’s, though it now seems to have disappeared again.” C&M 470 n. 1.

by decree of the pope, an epitaph was written on his memorial, so that the memory of his devotion might remain preserved forever and those who read or heard it read might be kindled to religious zeal by his example.⁷⁴

In addition to stating how such an inscription on a gravestone would be received – through either reading it or hearing it read aloud – Bede implies that his broader purpose for including the epitaph in the *Historia* reflects the pope's own intentions: to preserve the "memoria" [memory] of Cædwalla for all who encounter this text. The twenty-four-line epitaph in verse records Cædwalla's praiseworthy attributes and his travel to Rome, his final resting place, and then closes with a prose statement, "Here is buried Cædwalla, who is also Peter, king of the Saxons."⁷⁵ Where previously Cædwalla's body, to which the epitaph ultimately points, had been the vehicle for his performance of devotion, the text now stands in to continue "performing," embodying in writing Cædwalla's admirable deeds and stimulating others through his memory.

This transfer of "here-ness" and the tension of simultaneous absence and presence are perhaps most clearly seen in the poetic epitaph of Alcuin of York, the Northumbrian-born scholar and later Abbot of Tours who composed his own gravestone inscription shortly before his death in 804.⁷⁶ Like the epitaphs in Bede's *Historia*,⁷⁷ Alcuin's epitaph draws on conventions of the genre as well as the Roman *memento mori*; however, as a piece that was composed by the very person it commemorates, this epitaph's engagement with the reader thoroughly invents the space of the grave, which is imagined by Alcuin – yet living – before his body is in it. Alcuin's verses are followed by a brief prose legend that was added after his death; together, they read:

Here, I beg, stop for a little while, traveler, and ponder my words in your heart, so that you may recognize your fate in my figure: the appearance changes, as mine has, so will yours. What you are now, famous in the world, I have been, traveler, and what I now am, you will be in the future. I was inclined to pursue the pleasures of the world in vain desire: now I am ashes and dust, and food for worms. Remember, therefore, to take better care of your soul than of your body, because that remains, and this passes away. Why do you seek estates? You see in what a small cavern this rest holds me: yours will be made just as small. Why do you desire to clothe in Tyrian purple your body, which soon the hungry worm will consume in the dust? Just as flowers pass away when the menacing wind comes, so indeed, flesh, all your glory will

74 Bede, *HE* V.7 (C&M, 470); my translation.

75 Ibid. (C&M, 472); my translation.

76 Luitpold Wallach, "The Epitaph of Alcuin: A Model of Carolingian Epigraphy," *Speculum* 30 (1955): 367–73.

77 Wallach notes that "the sepulchral inscriptions inserted by Bede in the *Ecclesiastical History* were naturally known to Alcuin, since Bede is the main source of the poem on his native York ['The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York'];" *ibid.*, 371.

pass away. Give me, I beg you, reader, a return for this poem, and say: "Grant pardon, Christ, to your servant." I implore you, let no hand profane the holy rights of this tomb, until the angelic trumpet resounds from on high: "You who lie in the tomb, rise from the dust of the earth, the Mighty Judge appears to countless thousands." My name was Alcuin, wisdom was always dear to me; pour out prayers for me in your mind when you read this inscription.

Here rests the lord Alcuin of blessed memory, the Abbot, who died in peace on the 19th of May. When you read, all of you, pray for him and say: "The Lord grant him eternal rest." Amen.⁷⁸

The epitaph, which was engraved on a bronze tablet but now survives only in manuscript copies, petitions a "traveler," imagined walking past Alcuin's inscribed tomb.⁷⁹ Alcuin uses a number of Roman epigraphic formulas, including the appeal to the wayfarer and the comparison "as I am now, so too you will be," as well as the warning against the desecration of his tomb.⁸⁰ And, as Catherine A. M. Clarke points out in her study of the economy of the Anglo-Saxon epitaph, Alcuin's "whole poem [is] constructed around a central conceit of reading, reckoning and return": in exchange for the moral exemplum he offers for the benefit of this passerby, Alcuin insists that he "pour out prayers" when contemplating this text.⁸¹ Alcuin's epitaph thus constructs a dynamic relationship between the text, the reader, and his corpse, which is speaking, animated, and yet unseen.⁸² The expression of this relationship in the epitaph also emphasizes the importance of the inscription in *mediating* between the living and the dead, because this text is imagined on a tomb that did not yet exist, and was written by a man who was not yet dead.

Alcuin's epitaph necessarily constructs his own absence, since he is present at the epitaph's composition, but understood as *not*-present in the text itself. Alcuin's presence is, however, explicitly conveyed by the very inscription that has absented him: composed in first-person, the inscription is in the position of the embodied speaker. The "hic" that conventionally opens the epitaph (and points to Alcuin's grave) speaks "here" on his behalf; put another way, from the reader's standpoint,

78 Ibid., 367–68; my translation.

79 Ibid., 367.

80 Ibid., 370.

81 Clarke, *Writing Power*, 50.

82 Alcuin's epitaph shares this petition for prayer and these images of the rotting body with the work of the Anglo-Saxon poet Cynewulf: Cynewulf supplies his name in runes that are incorporated into the poetic lines of four poems and asks for the reader's prayers after death, imagining his body as food for worms. In the epilogue to *Fates of the Apostles*, Cynewulf writes, "I shall need gracious friends / on the journey, when the far home, / unknown dwelling, I must seek alone, / and leave behind me the body – the portion of earth, / the slaughter-spoil – to remain as a benefit to worms" (lines 91b–95); *Fates of the Apostles*, *The Vercelli Book*, ed. George Philip Krapp, ASPR 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 51–54. For a study of the relationship between word and body in Cynewulf's epilogues, see Jill Hamilton Clements, "Reading, Writing and Resurrection: Cynewulf's Runes as a Figure of the Body," *Anglo-Saxon England* 43 (2014): 133–54.

the text “here” and Alcuin are one and the same. The epitaph’s function as Alcuin’s surrogate physical presence is underscored throughout the poem in its focus on the physical body, which is everywhere described but physically absent. This exchange of flesh for text is introduced early on: starting with the phrase “my words,” Alcuin’s traveler is asked to imagine this inscribed marker as a speaking body, conveying its speech as if an enfleshed speaker and warning this traveler of the perils of his own mortality. These words are figuratively Alcuin’s, from whom the speech is understood to originate, but they also refer to the written text itself. Understood deictically, the “I,” “me,” and “mine” of the epitaph refer most immediately to the grave marker, *not* to Alcuin’s body. Even the statement at the epitaph’s close, “My name was Alcuin,” applies dually to the inscription and to the unseen body. So, while the epitaph implies that it is through Alcuin’s (invisible) rotting flesh that the reader must consider his own fate, it is literally through the “figure” of the *text* that a reader may learn what awaits him in death. With Alcuin’s body admittedly dissolved and concealed, the inscription gestures toward *itself* as this body, and transfers Alcuin’s identity from the transitory flesh to the perdurable text. Embodying the presence of Alcuin, the inscription self-consciously renders the body as a text, pointing ultimately to itself as it directs the reader’s attention to its location at the grave and Alcuin’s unseen remains. The imagined proximity of the text to the buried body makes this monument and its parchment copies physical extensions of Alcuin himself, as it mediates this “porous boundary” between the body and the commemorative writing that marks the grave.⁸³

Similar to the epitaphs included by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History*, Alcuin’s epitaph was circulated on parchment to readers, many of whom would never have seen the text engraved on the brass tablet at his grave. Even so, the conventional locative sense of *hic* [here] and the epitaph’s vivid descriptions of the decomposing body would compel any reader to imagine the grave and the rotting corpse within it, further compelling him to prayer both for the dead and for his own soul. Especially for Anglo-Saxon religious – for whom commemorative texts were essential to maintaining relationships between the living and the dead – epitaphs copied on parchment *extended* the bonds of confraternity beyond those with immediate access to the graveyard to create communities linked by postmortem prayer. These commemorative technologies materially embodied the absent dead, metonymically extending the presence of the dead to readers both locally and abroad, whose prayers were an aid to salvation.

Writing the special dead: relic tags and lists

The last category of commemorative texts to be examined is related to the deaths of the “very special dead”: the saints, whose bodies are treated with particular

83 Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 14.

reverence after death.⁸⁴ A common trope in medieval hagiography is the perfect preservation of the saintly body, discovered uncorrupt months or years after death when the grave is opened, but the bodies of saints had other afterlives, in parts rather than whole.⁸⁵ Body parts of saints and contact relics were imbued with special power to heal, and the shrines that held them were often the sites of great miracles. While, early on, the Anglo-Saxon church was not inclined to divide the bodies of saints, when a body *did* become disarticulated (or was transported back to England as a relic already detached from the rest of the body), identifying these parts was naturally quite precarious.⁸⁶ In such cases, “the naming of each relic was crucial, especially since they might all be kept together,” and so the bones and objects were often labeled, or “tagged,” to distinguish them from the others.⁸⁷ As Patrick Conner remarks regarding the lists of relics from Exeter, “the fragments of desiccated human tissue, typical of the items identified with Exeter’s collection, would have defied practical description for the purposes of identification in a document not physically attached to them.”⁸⁸ Some relic tags in early insular scripts have been found on the Continent, such as the label discovered at Chelles for the beard of St. Boniface, written in the Anglo-Saxon hand of the monks at Fulda.⁸⁹ In England, we know relic tags must have existed in some numbers at Anglo-Saxon religious houses because they were the raw material for the composition of relic lists, a few of which do survive from the eleventh century or earlier. These tags and lists allowed the saints’ bodies to be read, and therefore offer a noteworthy complement to the aforementioned commemorative genres’ concerns about the body, text, and identity.

One of the earliest English relic lists comes from Exeter and occupies fols. 8r–14r of a gospel book (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D.2.16).⁹⁰ This particular list, the only one from Exeter in Old English, is more than simply a catalogue of items (as relic lists often are), but “has been identified as a sermon, appropriate to

84 I borrow this phrase from Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), Ch. 4: “The Very Special Dead.”

85 See Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, especially at 88–94.

86 David Rollason remarks that early on, “There were indeed fragmentary corporeal relics of English saints but they are exceptional”; *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 27.

87 Nigel Ramsay et al., “List of Relics” in the *Monastic Archives* of University College London, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/history/research/monasticarchives/typology/list>, September 15, 2015.

88 Patrick W. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History* (Boydell, 1993), 172. See also Julia M. H. Smith, “Portable Christianity: Relics in the Medieval West (c.700–1200),” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 181 (2012): 143–67.

89 See Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, AD300–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 288–89.

90 See the catalogue of relic lists from English monasteries in I. G. Thomas, “The Cult of Saints’ Relics in Medieval England,” Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis (University of London, 1974), 341–50. Among the other eleventh-century lists Thomas mentions are fols. 55v, 57v–58v of Stowe 944, the same manuscript containing the New Minster *Liber Vitae*.

the mass or procession for the feast of the relics at Exeter.”⁹¹ The text opens with the praise of King Æthelstan, who gathered holy relics from overseas and gave them to the minster at Exeter “for his soul’s redemption.”⁹² It then inventories 138 relics held at Exeter by noting that “we will tell you without any deceit” what the minster’s collection of relics contains.⁹³ The list describes each item to varying degrees of detail, sometimes noting the body part (e.g., “finger-bone of St. Mary Magdalene”) and in other cases simply stating that a piece is “from” a particular saint.⁹⁴

In addition to expressing the prominence of Exeter as a site whose holiness warrants such a rich collection of relics, this Old English list and the Latin relic lists from Exeter highlight the importance of being able to *identify* the objects in the collection. Conner argues regarding the sermon that sets up this Old English relic list that

Merely displaying its 138 relics would not have been an effective way to convince an audience of the importance of relics, especially if their response might have significant implications for the future of the minster; therefore, a text was written to publicise properly the extent of the relic-collection at Exeter.⁹⁵

In order for the inventory of relics to be rhetorically effective for the minster, they needed to be able to verbally account for these objects, in some cases with substantial flourish. Having each object labeled would be essential to this process. The importance of the relic tags is demonstrated in a note at the end of another Exeter relic list that appears in the “Leofric Missal” (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 579), which explains regarding Exeter’s collection that “they have several other relics of saints in addition to these, about which we are ignorant, since we do not find their names written.”⁹⁶ Without written details, one is left with an anonymous heap of remains. Where lists such as these from Exeter are concerned, it is the *writing* of the relics that gives them their rhetorical power: these items are not merely a tooth or a bit of fabric, but holy relics from the body of St. Agatha and from the robe of St. Peter. Relic tags make the bodies of saints legible, bringing meaning to the flesh that is left behind in order to enable their proper veneration and also to stir devotion within the living.

Conclusion

Each of these categories of “writing the dead” exploits the perdurability of writing to counter the potential dissolution of identity and of the flesh after death. Authors

91 Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, 175.

92 The Exeter relic lists are edited in Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, here at 176.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid., 185.

95 Ibid., 176.

96 Fol. 6r and 6v from the “Leofric Missal,” Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 579, translated in Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, 172.

such as Alcuin provided proleptically for their own remembrance after death, composing texts that were meant to outlive their own bodies and thus sustain an embodied, physical presence in spite of the body's inevitable absence. And the saintly dead would be remembered by the living because of the role written text came to play in retelling the saint's life and how the living dealt with the saints' physical bodies as objects equally in need of texts for preservation and remembrance. Since being forgotten by God (and thus consigned to the oblivion of hell) was the greatest threat to the soul, the inscribed text offered a means by which one might maintain a presence among living petitioners in this world and at once prefigure and aid one's metaphorical inscription in heaven.

2

FROM POWERFUL AGENTS TO SUBORDINATE OBJECTS? THE RESTLESS DEAD IN THIRTEENTH- AND FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ICELAND¹

Kirsi Kanerva

Introduction

Apparitions of dead people – ghosts – form a common theme in medieval European sources, including popular tradition, even though some Church Fathers had insisted that the dead could not return.² In thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Old Icelandic saga literature, which was based on an oral tradition several centuries old, ghosts appeared frequently. The essence of these saga revenants was corporeal: they were dead people appearing to the living in their physical, recognizable, and undecayed bodies. These physical revenants – or restless, reanimated, and living dead, as they will also be called in this study – had both malevolent and benevolent functions in sagas: they gave assistance and advice to people, but could also cause the living trouble and fear as well as madness, disease, or death. If malevolent restlessness was expected or occurred it could be prevented by burying the body in a faraway place, possibly on a shore where the sea level changed periodically, by decapitating the corpse, or by burning the body and burying the ashes (which still

- 1 I thank Philip Line for comments and for correcting my English. This research has been undertaken as part of the Mind and the Other project funded by the Academy of Finland's Research Program Human Mind, 266573.
- 2 See e.g. Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Nancy Caciola, "Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture," *Past & Present* 152 (1996): 3–45; Nancy Caciola, "Spirits Seeking Bodies: Death, Possession and Communal Memory in the Middle Ages," in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge, New York & Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 66–86; John D. Martin, "Law and the (Un)Dead: Medieval Models for Understanding the Hauntings in *Eyrbyggja saga*," *Saga-Book* 29 (2005): 67–82.

contained the bad influence associated with the dead body) in a remote place or scattering them at sea.³

In the light of earlier studies, the dead in sagas generally became restless of their own free and often malevolent will.⁴ Consequently, activity after death was usually not a punishment for the deceased, but an expression of their wish to continue to participate in the society of the living. Behind this was presumably a belief in some kind of life power and vitality that remained in the human body after death – “a pagan relic,” as Vésteinn Ólason has called it, that may have survived in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland.⁵ It was expected that certain people, whether alive or dead, could possess such a strong “personality,” or have such “charisma” and strong will that they had an impact on others and continued to exert this authority (and express their strong will) even posthumously.⁶

The strong-willed dead who exerted their authority on the living appear especially frequently in the so-called Sagas of Icelanders, *Íslendingasögur*, which recited events that had taken place from the settlement period of Iceland onwards, around 870–1030, but were written in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, over 200 years after Icelanders had adopted Christianity in 1000. In other more mythical saga genres such as Eddic poetry, often thought to derive from the pagan period (ca. 900) but available only in later manuscripts (ca. 1270 and later), and the somewhat later *fornaldarsögur* (also called Legendary sagas, written ca. 1270–1400), however, the dead sometimes appear as more passive. In some of these sources, the deceased appear as if awakened against their will by various mythical beings such as pagan gods and goddesses, or witches practicing magic to serve their own

3 Leszek Gardela, “Buried with Honour and Stoned to Death? The Ambivalence of Viking Age Magic in the Light of Archaeology,” *Analecta Archaeologica Ressorviensia* 4 (2011): 339–359; Leszek Gardela, “The Dangerous Dead? Rethinking Viking-Age Deviant Burials,” in *Conversions: Looking for Ideological Change in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Leszek Slupecki and Rudolf Simek (Fassbaender: Vienna, 2013), 99–136, here 100–107; Anne Irene Riisøy, “Deviant Burials: Societal Exclusion of Dead Outlaws in Medieval Norway,” in *Collegium: Studies across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 18: *Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen (Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, 2015), 74–75. Electronically available at http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/journal/volumes/volume_18/index_18.htm. Accessed June 3, 2016); Kirsí Kanerva, “Having no Power to Return? Suicide and Posthumous Restlessness in Medieval Iceland,” *Thanatos* 4.1 (2015): 57–79, here 59–60.

4 See e.g. Jesse L. Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 133; Vésteinn Ólason, “The Un/Grateful Dead: from Baldr to Bægifótr,” in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003), 161; Arnved Nedkvitne, *Mötet med döden i norrön medeltid*, trans. Bo Eriksson Janbrink (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2004), 38–43; Martin, “Law and the (Un)Dead,” 75–80; Kirsí Kanerva, “Rituals for the Restless Dead: The Authority of the Deceased in Medieval Iceland,” in *Authorities in the Middle Ages. Influence, Legitimacy and Power in Medieval Society*, ed. Sini Kangas, Mia Korpiola and Tuija Ainonen (Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2013), 205–227.

5 Ólason, “The Un/Grateful Dead,” 167.

6 Kanerva, “Rituals for the Restless Dead”; Kanerva, “Having no Power to Return?” 57–79.

interests.⁷ A good example is the dead warriors that keep rising after they have fallen and continue the battle. In the story of Sörli, *Sörli Þáttur*, the earliest version of which is found in the late fourteenth-century manuscript known as Flatey-jarbók, the warriors rise repeatedly because of a spell cast on them by the goddess Freyja, while in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, probably compiled in the late fourteenth century, the living dead warriors are raised by Queen Skuld while she sits on a special platform for witches (*seiðhjallr*). In a similar way, in the Eddic poem *Völuspá* the god Óðinn awakens a seeress (*völva*). The poem survives in thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century manuscripts, but may already have existed by the end of the tenth century.⁸ Additionally, in some fourteenth-century saga sources (*Grettis saga*, *Selkollu þáttur*) it is implied that restless corpses were made active by “unclean spirits” possibly because the spirits invaded the dead bodies.

As I have previously discussed the restlessness of the strong-willed dead in *Íslendingasögur*, I will touch upon the subject only briefly in this discussion and concentrate on the more subordinate and passive role of the dead.⁹ I will consider the possible changes in medieval Icelandic beliefs about revenants, bearing in mind what Terry Gunnell has reported concerning “waking up” of the dead in nineteenth-century Icelandic folklore. In these later sources the dead are at times ascribed subordinacy as they were deliberately “woken up” by using various magic rituals and formulae (e.g. saying the Lord’s Prayer backwards) so that they could be used to serve the purposes of the awakener. Gunnell suggests that these “raised dead” legends were deeply rooted in medieval and Viking Age belief and

7 Here “magic” is used in its modern (academic) sense: magic can be construed as “use of supernatural techniques to accomplish specific aims” (as defined by Conrad Phillip Kottak, *Anthropology: The Exploration of Human Diversity* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004], see “magic” in the Glossary), “a set of beliefs and practices designed to control the visible or invisible world for specific purposes” (Emily Schutz & Robert H. Lavenda, *Cultural Anthropology: A Perspective on the Human Condition* [Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 2001], 169), and a “belief that supernatural powers can be compelled to act in certain ways for good or evil purposes by recourse to certain specified formulas” (William Haviland, *Anthropology* [Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2003], 671). See Robert Shanafelt, “Magic, Miracle, and Marvels in Anthropology,” *Ethnos* 69.3 (2004): 318.

8 See on *Sörli þáttur*, *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Völuspá*, Rudolf Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2007), 195, 356, 430; John McKinnell, “Völuspá,” in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (New York: Garland, 1993), 713–715. Gísli Sigurðsson has argued, however, that it is not explicitly stated that Óðinn raises a dead *völva* in *Völuspá*, but that a still living *völva* may be sitting on the mound and Óðinn merely enables her to see the future. Gísli Sigurðsson, “Ein sat hún úti”. Leitar Óðinn þekkingar hjá völfunni eða opnast henna sýn fyrir tilstilli Óðins? in *Heiðin minni. Greinar um fornar bókmenntir*, ed. Haraldr Bessason and Baldur Hafstað (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, háskólaforlag Máls og menningar, 1999), 209–219.

9 Kirsí Kanerva, “The Role of the Dead in Medieval Iceland: A Case Study of Eyrbyggja saga,” *Collegium Mediaevale* 24 (2011): 23–49; Kanerva, “Rituals for the Restless Dead”; Kanerva, “Having no Power to Return?”; Kirsí Kanerva, “Messages from the Other-world: The Roles of the Dead in Medieval Iceland,” in *Deconstructing Death: Changing Cultures of Death, Dying, Bereavement and Care in the Nordic Countries*, ed. Michael Hviid Jacobsen (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2013), 111–130.

traditions.¹⁰ I will consider, however, whether the subordinate dead is a later motif, adopted as a consequence of foreign influence, including Christian and necromantic ideas that became integrated with the indigenous conception, according to which the dead were active agents who had a will and power of their own and returned if and when they wished to do so, without the help of any necromantic practices or unclean spirits.

The main sources of my study consist of the above-mentioned saga genres, *Íslendingasögur*, *fornaldarsögur*, and Eddic poetry, whose origin is in the oral story telling tradition.¹¹ As auxiliary sources, I will also employ other literary sources that were known in Iceland during the period under inspection here. The writers of these texts are usually unknown, although there has occasionally been speculation about the authors of *Íslendingasögur*. Some of the writers were apparently educated lay men, but some texts show traces of clerical origin. For medieval Icelanders, the sources in question were an important part of their identity. They were regarded as history and considered to transmit wisdom that had been transmitted orally prior to being written down. The sagas were construed as reciting the pagan past, the settlement of Iceland and the period after that, ca. 870–1030 (*Íslendingasögur*) and the mythic-heroic past that had preceded the settlement era (*fornaldarsögur*), and knowledge of Nordic gods and legendary heroes was also transmitted in Eddic poetry. However, the texts were first written down on vellum several hundred years after the events described in them had supposedly occurred, or long after oral composition had taken place, mainly in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This temporal distance allowed the saga writers some authorial creativity, although people's knowledge of the stories in such a lively oral tradition also limited it. The context of the stories is more or less pagan, whereas the historical context in which the stories became literary texts was at least nominally Christian.

The writers were apparently aware of the temporal distance between their own era and the age that was depicted in the texts, particularly its paganism as a contrast to the Christianity of their own time, and may have consciously made the past more archaic in nature.¹² In thirteenth-century Iceland there was also a boom of antiquarian interest in mythical poetry, although in the previous two centuries

10 Terry Gunnell, "Waking the Dead: Folk Legends Concerning Magicians and Walking Corpses in Iceland," in *News from Other Worlds: Studies in Nordic Folklore, Mythology and Culture*, ed. Merrill Kaplan and Timothy R. Tangherlini (Berkeley & Los Angeles: North Pinehurst Press, 2012), 256.

11 On the sources, see e.g. Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, trans. Andrew Wawn (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1998); Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*, trans. Nicholas Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); and the article collections of Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (ed.), *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Rory McTurk, (ed.), *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

12 Carol J. Clover, "Icelandic Family Sagas," in Clover and Lindow, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, 239–315.

pagan practices and tradition may have been condemned.¹³ It is also possible that as the Christian worldview became more and more integrated into medieval Icelandic thought, interest in legends (i.e. short narratives of the encounters with the supernatural) of pagan origin increased as a kind of cultural protest, and was manifested in the revenant figures of the literature.¹⁴ Additionally, some of the writers may have wished to depict the restless dead in a manner that was considered right and appropriate, for instance, from the perspective of the clerical elite, or explain a phenomenon that for some medieval readers may have been only vaguely familiar.

To evaluate the source value of the texts – what they tell us of contemporary beliefs and conceptions – I have departed from the principle that literature may reflect the social reality in which it is produced while also shaping this reality and being shaped by it. The sources studied here were all based on oral tradition, which can be considered fluid, and although the sources undoubtedly contain long-term cultural layers in the Braudelian sense, the tradition is susceptible to change and variation.¹⁵ Consequently, the revenant figures may reflect beliefs of pagan origin that still existed in the long-term layers of culture. Still, as the texts could also have didactic purposes they may reveal what people were expected to think of the possible posthumous activity. As literature, the sources discussed here conveyed revenant discourses that offered people a language – how to speak of revenants – but also restricted the ways in which the revenants could be depicted. Therefore the sources may tell us something of contemporary conceptions and how they may have changed in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland.

In the following sub-chapters, I will discuss the reanimation of corpses that appear as subordinate objects. What was thought to cause the reanimation? Is there a cultural change to be detected in medieval sources, from strong-willed dead whose power to return was based on their own personal capability to submissive restless dead, or was subordinacy a native element? I will suggest that there was a gradual change from the dead as active agents to revenants as passive and subordinate objects that were raised by some external power, based on influences from Christian theology, necromantic practices, and translations of European literature. Still, both views existed side by side and were intertwined in the stories.

13 Judy Quinn, “From Orality to Literacy in Medieval Iceland,” in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 30–60.

14 On the gradual process of Christianization in Scandinavia, see Sverre Bagge, “Christianization and State Formation in Early Medieval Norway,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 30.2 (2005): 107–134. See also Ülo Valk, “Legends as Narratives of Alternative Beliefs,” in *Belief Narrative Genres*, ed. Zoja Karanovij and Willem de Blécourt (Navi Sad: ISFNR, 2012), 23–29.

15 See e.g. Frog, “Mythology in Cultural Practice: A Methodological Framework for Historical Analysis,” *RMN Newsletter* 10 (2015): 33–57.

The case of Glámr the Revenant: unclean spirit as the reanimator of the dead

The early fourteenth-century *Grettis saga*, one of the *Íslendingasögur* that recited stories of the settlers of Iceland and their descendants around 870–1030 but which were written first in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, tells of Glámr, an odd, troll-like man who is said to originate from the land of the Swedes, a country that medieval Icelanders held as more pagan since the Swedes had accepted Christianity slightly later than the Icelanders.¹⁶ According to the saga, Glámr comes to Iceland briefly after Icelanders have officially become Christians and becomes a shepherd on a farm. Glámr's genealogy is not given in the text or anywhere else in the known sources, suggesting that he was considered an unimportant person, not really worthy of respect. As a shepherd, he is among those of lowest social status in the household. He is also represented as unpleasant and untrustworthy in all respects; he is aloof from everyone, fairly unsociable, large in stature, and – most importantly for this study – becomes a vicious revenant after his death.¹⁷

Despite the lack of respectable genealogy, the saga brings forth other details that show that Glámr shares characteristics with other revenants in *Íslendingasögur*. Although he is only a farm worker, he does not take no for an answer from his superiors: when the mistress of the house has no wish to give him anything to eat during the Christmas fast, she nevertheless ends up doing so. Glámr does not want any Christian tricks, just his meal, and though the mistress suspects that such an ill deed during the fast will turn out badly for him, he demands to have his food, saying “it would turn out worse for her otherwise.”¹⁸ The excerpt also focuses attention on the threat of physical violence posed by Glámr's character and his physical bulk, the latter a feature that is often associated, alongside strong will, with people of unusual abilities, including the ability to return posthumously.¹⁹ In the saga culture, strong will and authority was not merely a matter of status based on wealth and respectable genealogy, but could also be possessed by other figures who were not highly ranked socially but were nevertheless well thought of, or, like Glámr, physically outstanding individuals who could exert their power because of their physical strength.²⁰

16 The saga was composed around 1320–1330, but the main vellum manuscripts all date from the fifteenth century. On the surviving manuscripts and versions, see Guðni Jónsson, “Formáli,” in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* [...], ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1936), lxviii–lxxvii.

17 *Grettis saga* in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* [...], ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1936), 109–123.

18 [...] kvað henni annat skyldu vera verra, *Grettis saga*, 111. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

19 Kanerva, “Having no Power to Return,” 142. On the great size of women associated with skills in magic, see also Kjartan G. Ottósson, *Fróðánundur í Eyrbyggju* (Reykjavík: Menningar sjóðs, 1983), 71; Kirsi Kanerva, “‘Eigi er sá heill, er í augun verkir.’ Eye Pain as a Literary Motif in Thirteenth and Fourteenth-Century *Íslendingasögur*,” *ARV – Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 69 (2013): 7–35.

20 See e.g. Sverre Bagge, “From Fist to Scepter: Authority in Norway in the Middle Ages,” in *Authorities in the Middle Ages: Influence, Legitimacy, and Power in Medieval Society*,

Apart from being strong-willed and possessing some authority because of his size and physical strength, the saga also implies that Glámr is an irritable person (*skapstyggur*), especially if he cannot have his own way; as Glámr says to the man who employs him as a shepherd: “I’ll be most useful to you if I am left to do as I please, because I have a bad temper when I don’t like something.”²¹ Glámr’s irritability suggests a proneness to anger – an emotional state that could contribute to posthumous restlessness, as argued in earlier studies. Dying in an angry mood could be the cause of posthumous restlessness, and anger was construed as a substance of at least partly material nature that could remain in the corpse and through this contribute to its reanimation.²²

Accordingly, Glámr’s disposition and personality (which, in the *Íslendingasögur*, was usually considered permanent and unchanging), that is his bad temper and tendency to anger, and his physical characteristics all imply a strong connection with other saga revenants, suggesting that in the early fourteenth-century context Glámr’s posthumous return followed the native understanding of postmortem activity. What distinguishes Glámr from an “ordinary” revenant, however, is the implication that the restlessness of Glámr’s corpse was somehow linked to an “unclean spirit” (*óhreinndi*). More precisely, Glámr the revenant is himself called an unclean spirit after he has been banished by the hero of the saga.²³ A dead body that is reanimated by an *óhreinndi* also appears in a story of a seal-headed restless corpse Selkolla, known as *Selkollu þáttur*, which may help to explain further what the phenomenon was thought to entail. The story is included in the Icelandic cleric Arngrímr Brandsson’s (d. 1361) hagiographical biography of an Icelandic saintly (but not canonized) bishop of Hólar from 1203 to 1237, Guðmundr Arason (1161–1237), compiled around 1345.²⁴

ed. Sini Kangas, Mia Korpiola and Tuija Ainonen (Berlin & Boston: de Gruyter, 2013), 161–181, on the importance of personal characteristics instead of hereditary rights in acquisition of authority in medieval Norway.

21 Svá mun þér hentust mín vist, at ek fara sjálfráðr, því at ek em skapstyggur, ef mér líkar eigi vel. *Grettis saga*, 110. Trans. Bernard Scudder in Viðar Hreinsson (ed.), *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders Including 49 Tales*, 2 (Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson Publishing, 1997), 101.

22 Kirsí Kanerva, “Restless Dead or Peaceful Cadavers? Preparations for Death and Afterlife in Medieval Iceland,” in *Saving Souls, Safeguarding Memory: Preparations for Death in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe*, ed. Anu Lahtinen and Mia Korpiola (Brill: forthcoming); Kirsí Kanerva, *Porous Bodies, Porous Minds. Emotions and the Supernatural in the Íslendingasögur (ca. 1200–1300)* (Ph.D. diss., University of Turku, 2015), 100–106. The preservation of anger in the corpse is suggested by the posthumous somatic changes – blackening and swelling of the body – that medieval Icelanders considered signs of the movements of the dead person’s mind, that is his or her emotions, as the human mind was thought to survive death. For an example, see the portrayal of the corpse of Þórólfr bægifótr in *Eyrbyggja saga*, in *Eyrbyggja saga* [...], ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1935), 94–95, 169–170, and the analysis of this portrayal in Kanerva, “Restless Dead or Peaceful Cadavers?”. See also, on the belief that some life remained in the corpse, Vésteinn Ólason, “The (Un)Grateful Dead,” 161.

23 On Glámr as *óhreinndi*, see *Grettis saga*, 122. The original cause of all trouble is an “evil spirit,” a *meinwættur*. Ibid., 109.

24 *Selkollu þáttur* in *Byskupa sögur* (vol. 3), ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, Haukadalsútgáfan, 1948), 294–313. The saga was originally written in Latin but later translated into Old Icelandic. On the saga, see Simek & Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 19, 132–133; Torfi H. Tulinius, “Political Echoes: Reading Eyrbyggja Saga in Light of

Selkollu þátrr tells of two servants, a man and a woman, who are supposed to take an unnamed child to be baptized. The servants nevertheless forget their duty for a while and surrender to bodily pleasures and have casual sex, leaving the unbaptized child neglected. When they return, the child has become inanimate (*dauðr*) and sickly looking (*illiligr*). The servants choose to abandon the child because of its ugly appearance, and the district is soon haunted by a woman with a seal's head associated with the dead unbaptized child. The being also appears to be able to change shape, as it occasionally appears in the shape of a bondwoman and a servant girl.²⁵

Interestingly, *Selkollu þátrr* explains that the birth of this seal-headed woman, also called a *fjandi* (indicating enemy and fiend, i.e. Satan) that maimed men, originated from an event when an unclean spirit jumped into the *búkr*, that is the headless torso of the child (*at óhreinn andi var hlaupinn í búk barnsins*). *Selkollu þátrr* therefore suggests that the unclean spirit was something that entered the corpse of the child and, as a result of its presence in the dead body, the appearance of the child was transformed, appearing at various times as a seal-headed woman (*kona*), a housewife (*húsfreyja*) or a servant woman (*kona*), who, unlike the presumably recently born and helpless unbaptized child, could move about and involve itself in various dubious deeds, such as engaging in inappropriate sexual acts with a husbandman or trying to pull the saintly bishop's breeches off.²⁶

Calling Glámr an unclean spirit, *óhreinn andi*, appears to suggest that, like Selkolla, a spirit had invaded Glámr's corpse, making it posthumously active.²⁷ In other words, quite unlike the prototype of an "ordinary" strong-willed saga revenant described above, Glámr and Selkolla appear to have become subordinate to some "unclean" or demonic influence. Their posthumous restlessness is linked to some external – presumably spirit-like – power. The writer of the saga thus appears to have deprived Glámr of some of the agency that was usually ascribed to the strong-willed medieval Icelandic ghosts.

Although the author/s of *Grettis saga* are anonymous and its sources uncertain, there is a possible link between it and the story of Selkolla. The source of *Selkollu þátrr* is mentioned as "herra Sturla," identified by Torfi H. Tulinius as Sturla Þórðarson, a thirteenth-century saga writer who was a member of one of the powerful thirteenth-century Icelandic families, the Sturlungs, as well as a

Contemporary Conflicts," in *Learning and Understanding the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop and Tarrin Wills (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2007), 62.

25 *Selkollu þátrr*, 494–495. See also Kanerva, "Role of the Dead,," Margaret Cormack, "Better Off Dead: Approaches to Medieval Miracles," in *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Thomas DuBois (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 341–342.

26 *Selkollu þátrr*, 495, 498.

27 It is possible that the writer wished to imply that Glámr had "swallowed" the unclean spirit as he ate during the fast, a common means of becoming demonically possessed in medieval literature. On medieval Christian ideas of demonic possession, see also Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

contemporary of the above-mentioned bishop Guðmundr, whom Sturla's nephews had helped in his political conflicts. People who intended to preserve the memory of the saint-like bishop could well have collaborated with families who had supported him.²⁸ Some scholars have also attributed to Sturla the thirteenth-century *Íslendinga saga*, part of a so-called *Sturlunga saga* compilation that recites contemporary thirteenth-century events, in which Selkolla is likewise mentioned.²⁹ Sturla Þórðarson is mentioned three times in *Grettis saga* as the source of information and as a temporal point of comparison.³⁰

The writer of *Grettis saga* may well have known Sturla, and he has also used the genealogical information available in a version of *Landnámabók* that describes the settlement period of Iceland around 870–930, lists the families who inhabited Iceland, and tells anecdotes related to them that has been attributed to Sturla (known as *Sturlubók*).³¹ The connection between Sturla and the two sources that included stories of an unclean spirit invading dead bodies need not indicate, however, that the motif of the unclean spirit originated from Sturla. Instead, the idea of *óhreinndi* may be related to the attested clerical background of *Selkollu pátrr* and the posited clerical writer of *Grettis saga*, an issue that I will turn to next.

Christian influences in the case of Glámr the Revenant

A number of scholars have suggested that the author of *Grettis saga* was a learned person, presumably a cleric, who was well acquainted with medieval literature, including the vernacular sagas and foreign literature and story tradition, such as medieval European Romance literature and the Old English epic *Beowulf*.³² The worldview manifested in the saga is at times fairly Christian. In fact, the term *óhreinndi* gives a possible clue to an origin in ecclesiastical or religious circles. At least its first component, *óhreinndi*, denoting unclean, appears widely in Christian contexts and has religious connotations in many of them. According to *Ordbog over*

28 Tulinius, "Political Echoes," 62.

29 *Íslendinga saga* is preserved only in fourteenth-century manuscripts. In the saga Selkolla is described as an ogre or giantess (*flagð*). Gudbrand Vigfusson (ed.), *Sturlunga saga including the Íslendinga saga of lawman Sturla Thordsson and other works*, vol 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1878), 223.

30 *Grettis saga*, 157, 226, 289.

31 Guðni Jónsson, "Formáli," xxiv, xlv.

32 Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 125–127; Paul Schach, "Some Observations on the Influence of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* on Old Icelandic Literature," in *Old Norse Literature and Mythology. A Symposium*, ed. Edgar C. Polomé (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 81–129; Hermann Pálsson, "Sermo datur cunctis. A Learned Element in *Grettis saga*," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 94 (1979), 91–94; Robert Cook, "Grettis saga," in *Medieval Scandinavia*, 241–243; Susanne Kramarz-Bein, "Der Spesar Pátrr der Grettis saga. Tristan-Spuren in der Isländersaga," in *Studien zur Isländersaga*, ed. Rolf Heller (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 152–181; Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies. Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1995); Douglas C. Stedman, "Some Points of Resemblance between Beowulf and the Grettla," *Saga-Book* 8 (1913), 6–28; Joan Turville Petre, "Beowulf and Grettis saga: an Excursion," *Saga-Book* 19 (1974–1977), 347–357.

det norrøne prosasprog (*Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, hereafter *ONP*), which lists word occurrences in Old Norse-Icelandic Prose, the term appears to have been used most frequently in ecclesiastical texts (14 instances in the *ONP*). In addition, the term appears in sagas whose context is explicitly Christian: in the sagas of the two Christian kings of Norway, Óláfr Tryggvason and St Óláfr (four instances in *ONP*), and in some Icelandic Chivalric sagas (*riddarasögur*) that were adaptations and imitations of medieval European romances and have often been associated with clerical writers (four instances). The word also appears in the above-named Sturlunga saga compilation of contemporary sagas that recite events in Christianized twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland. They were written down shortly after the actual events, and unlike *Íslendingasögur*, occasionally describe explicitly the Christian customs of Iceland at the time.³³ In light of this, a clerical origin of the idea of *óhrein* *andi* as the reanimator of corpses and its religious connotations cannot be ruled out.

Óhrein *andi* appears to be a literal translation of the Latin term *spiritus immundus* (i.e. unclean spirit). Pope Gregory the Great (540–604), who was fairly popular in medieval Iceland, and whose texts were also translated to Old Icelandic and influenced vernacular literature, describes the unclean spirits in his *Moralia*.³⁴ According to him, these unclean spirits had fallen from the ethereal heaven and were wandering in the air, cast down because of their pride.³⁵ In the Scandinavian context, the expression “*immundi spiritus*” was also used, for instance, in a Latin text known as *Historia Norvegiae*, a book of Norwegian kings written by an anonymous, presumably Norwegian, clerical writer before 1178, but known to Icelandic writers as well, to represent a spirit called *gandr* involved in pagan practices.³⁶ According to Eldar

33 *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*, later *ONP*, <http://onp.ku.dk/>. (Accessed July 12, 2016) cites the following instances of ‘*óhrein*’ in: a) ecclesiastical texts: *Icelandic Homily Book*, *Elucidarius*, Gregory the Great’s texts, *Pals saga postola*, *Matheus saga postola*, *Péturs saga postola*, *Bartholomeus saga postola*, *Mariu saga*, *Vitae partum* (Heilagra manna sögur), *Stjorn*, *Duggals leiðsla*, *Jóns saga byskups*, *Árna saga biskups*, *Guðmundar saga biskups*; b) Sagas of the Christian kings Óláfr Tryggvason and St Óláfr: Oddr Snorrason’s *Ólaf saga Tryggvasonar*, Codex Frisianus version of *Heimskringla* (in the saga of Óláfr Tryggvason), *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, *Saga Óláfs konungs hins Helga*; c) the following *riddarasögur*: *Karlamagnus saga*, *Dínus saga dramláta*, *Gibbons saga*, *Sigurðar saga þögla*; d) Sturlunga saga compilation. *Andi*, on the other hand, is an old word whose connotations go back to the pagan period.

34 On Gregory the Great’s texts in Iceland, see Dag Strömbäck, “Some Remarks on Learned and Novelistic Elements in the Icelandic Sagas,” in *Nordica et Anglica. Studies in Honor of Stefán Einarsson*, ed. Allan H. Orrick (Hague: [s.n.], 1968), 140–147; Kirsten Wolf, “Gregory’s Influence on Old Norse-Icelandic Religious Literature,” in *Rome and the North. The Early Reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe*, ed. Rolf H. Bremmer Jr, Kees Dekker and David F. Johnson (Paris: Peeters, 2001), 255–274; Vésteinn Ólason, “Family Sagas,” in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 101–118, here 113–114.

35 *Moralia in Gregorius Magnus. Morales sur Job. 1. partie, Livres I et II*, ed. and trans. Robert Gillet and André de Gaudemaris (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1975), 232.

36 *Monumenta Historica Norvegiae: latinske kildekrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen*, ed. Gustav Storm (Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt, 1973 [1880]), 85; John McKinnell, “Encounters with *Völur*,” in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003), 110–131, here 114; Clive

Heide and Clive Tolley, the indigenous word *gandr* could be defined as a “soul or spirit sent forth (in a shape)” (e.g. of a fly, or vapor) to do harm to other people or search for things that have gone missing, for instance.³⁷ Medieval Icelanders may have associated a *spiritus immundus* with a *gandr* spirit in some contexts, but I think it is important that the learned writer of *Grettis saga* did not choose to use the indigenous word *gandr* to refer to the phenomenon that had reanimated Glámr’s (and Selkolla’s) corpse. Instead s/he employed the direct translation of the Latin term *spiritus immundus*. Accordingly, the writer did not regard the reanimator of Glámr’s corpse as a “soul or spirit sent forth” by an external agent to do harm to dead bodies.

It cannot be excluded that the view of revenants in *Grettis saga* (and *Selkollu þáttr*) also reflects theological views, or was a writer’s attempt to make the medieval readers of the saga familiar with a Christian term – and a Christian view of the origin of revenants. The views of ecclesiastical authorities varied from total denial of posthumous activity to the possibility that some dead people, especially saints, could indeed appear to the living.³⁸ *Elucidarius*, a twelfth-century translation of the medieval handbook of Christian faith *Elucidarium* by Honorius Augustodunensis (ca. 1080–1137), gives an example of when (if) and how in Christian theological thought the dead were expected to become posthumously restless. The discussion between the master (M) and his pupil (D) reads as follows:

M: The Anti-Christ performs many miracles and wonders [...] and he causes the dead men to rise up and bear witness to himself. [...]

D: Does he really raise up the dead?

M: Not quite. Because the devil [i.e. *diofull*] goes inside the body of the dead and speaks on the dead’s behalf, and it seems then as if the deceased was alive when he moves.³⁹

Tolley, “*Vorðr and gandr*. Helping Spirits in Norse Magic,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 110 (1995): 57–75; Clive Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic*, 2 (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2009), 511.

37 Tolley, “*Vorðr and gandr*,”; Eldar Heide, “Våpenet til Tor jamført med gand(r). Om utsend vind, skjegg, blåseinstrument, ‘vindhamrar’ og Tors-figurar,” in *The Sámi and the Scandinavians. Aspects of 2000 Years of Contact*, ed. Jurij Kusmenko (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2004), 55–72; Eldar Heide, “Spirits Through Respiratory Passages,” in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature. Sagas and the British Isles. Preprint Papers of the 13th International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6th–12th August 2006*. Electronically available at http://www.sagaconference.org/SC13/SC13_Heide.pdf. (Accessed July 12, 2016).

38 On the prevailing views, see e.g. Martin, “Law and the (Un)Dead”; Caciola, “Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture”. Because of lack of space, saints have not been discussed in this chapter.

39 [Magister:] Antichristus [...] gerir miclar iartegnir oc morg vndr [...] oc letr hann vpp risa dauða menn. oc bera ser vítni. [Discipulus:] Reisir hann vpp dauða at sonno. [Magister:] með ollu eígi. Þui at diofull gengr inn i licam hins dauða oc melir fyrir hann oc sýnist hann þa sem hann lífi er hann rōrist. *Elucidarius*, in *Elucidarius in Old Norse Translation*, ed. Evelyn Scherabon Firchow and Kaaren Grimstad (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1989), 127–128. On *Elucidarius*, see Simek & Herman Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 80.

According to *Elucidarius*, dead bodies can be reanimated if the devil invades the corpses and then speaks and moves on their behalf. The explanation bears resemblance to the portrayal of the birth of the revenant in *Selkollu þáttur*, and may help to understand the return of Glámr in *Grettis saga* as well. Although Glámr is actually called an unclean spirit in *Grettis saga*, it is also clear that before his career as a revenant he was a man. That Glámr's corpse is reanimated by *something*, by some power that invades the body, is suggested further as the saga mentions in connection with the events that a *meinvættur*, an "evil spirit" lives in the valley and causes harm to people, but disappears when Glámr dies and becomes a revenant, as if to suggest that it is the *meinvættur* that invades his corpse.⁴⁰ It is implied that this *meinvættur* is responsible for Glámr's death, since he dies in mysterious circumstances while he is looking after sheep alone, in the dark during the winter nights at Yuletide (the darkest time of the year), the very time of day and year when supernatural encounters were expected to happen.⁴¹ The excerpt in *Elucidarius* even raises the question as to whether the *meinvættur* in *Grettis saga* has taken the role attributed to the devil in *Elucidarius*. Furthermore, in the light of *Elucidarius* and *Moralia* the *óhreinndandi* may have been considered to be of demonic origin: a spirit-like power that wandered freely in the air, independent of any human influence, and possessed dead bodies so that the dead spoke and moved "as if they were alive." Interestingly, Glámr is one of the few malevolent revenants in *Íslendingasögur* who actually speaks! The writer of *Grettis saga* may have drawn on these ideas, especially if he was a man of the church.

It is also possible that the tale of Glámr had a didactic purpose. In effect, the theological view expressed in *Elucidarius* and presumably employed by the writer of *Grettis saga* was challenged by the view prevalent in many of the *Íslendingasögur*, according to which the dead were often considered to possess a vitality of their own that made them capable of returning posthumously. Alternative discourses of revenants should not surprise us, since the existence of diverse beliefs and conceptions of ghosts in the ecclesiastical and secular spheres have also been attested in earlier studies of medieval continental cultures.⁴² The portrayal of Glámr in *Grettis*

40 *Grettis saga*, 209; Ármann Jakobsson. "Vampires and Watchmen. Categorizing the Medieval Undead," *Journal for English and Germanic Philology* 110 (2011): 281–300; Ármann Jakobsson, "The Fearless Vampire Killers. A Note about the Icelandic Draugr and Demonic Contamination in *Grettis Saga*," *Folklore* 120 (2009): 307–316.

41 John Lindow, "*Þorsteins þáttur skelks* and the Verisimilitude of Supernatural Experience in Saga Literature," in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature. New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, ed. John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), 264–280; Daniel Sävborg, "Avstånd, gräns och förundran: Möten med de övernaturliga i islänningasagan," in *Greppaminni. Rit til heiðurs Vésteini Ólasyni sjötugum*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2009), 323–349.

42 See e.g. Caciola, "Spirits Seeking Bodies," 67. She has studied medieval North European sources. In effect, the Church and clerics in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland may be regarded as a kind of institutional authority, whereas the view of revenants expressed in *Íslendingasögur* could be considered an *alternative discourse* which challenged the truth of the Church and questioned its authority. See Valk, "Legends as Narratives of Alternative

saga, then, could be considered a response to indigenous views of revenants as self-animating, intended to demonstrate the “reality” of a demonic, or “unclean” origin for the restless dead and thus the “true” cause of the phenomenon. However, although the view of ghosts expressed in *Grettis saga* may reflect only the thoughts of the clerical elite, the text presumably influenced subsequent views and discourses of revenants. If we can judge by the number of surviving manuscript copies, *Grettis saga* enjoyed wide popularity during the following centuries.⁴³ The writer did not speak directly of demons or devils, however, although the word *djöfull* and its derivatives appear frequently in other texts, especially ecclesiastical.⁴⁴ It is possible that the writer deliberately employed vocabulary that was more profane in nature and avoided using words that had an ecclesiastical ring or origin.⁴⁵

The description of Glámr in *Grettis saga* was probably influenced by Christian theological thought, but it also contained native elements; Glámr the revenant appears as a combination of both indigenous elements and foreign concepts. Glámr was an unclean spirit, but shared many physical characteristics with the “ordinary” restless dead in *Íslendingasögur*, and an unpleasant character reminiscent of many of them. There is, however, a possible reason that the writer had Glámr’s corpse reanimated by an unclean spirit which is neither didactic nor so strongly influenced by theological concepts – because Glámr, as a shepherd, was inferior in status compared to many other revenants in *Íslendingasögur* and therefore lacked authority over the living (even if the housewife found him aggressive and frightening).

The idea of posthumous restlessness being caused by an unclean spirit deprived the deceased of some agency. Compared to the strong-willed revenants that appear frequently in the surviving sagas, a dead person reanimated through the agency of an unclean spirit was a passive object whose body was invaded and possessed and consequently subordinate to some transcendental power. Nevertheless, a transcendent was not the only authority that could govern the dead. The saga sources also include sequences that at first sight appear as deliberate use of magic: the dead are raised and made to fulfill some personal aims of their awakener. These instances will be discussed next.

The subordinate dead in Eddic poetry and *fornaldarsögur*

As mentioned in the introduction above, accounts of waking the dead mostly occur in Eddic poetry and the *fornaldarsögur*, legendary sagas that recite events in the

Beliefs,” 23 and 25. In Valk’s article, which concentrates of nineteenth-century Estonian folklore, this institutional authority is the Lutheran Church.

43 See e.g. Cook, “Grettis saga,” 242.

44 In *ONP* there are 95 instances of the word *djöfull*, the majority of which can be found in ecclesiastical texts.

45 The concept “unclean spirit” (*óhrein andi*) although of ecclesiastical origin and employed especially in Christian contexts may have been more easily paralleled with the indigenous concept “evil spirit” (*meinvættir*), whereas “devil” (*djöfull*) was an explicitly Christian concept.

mythical pagan past prior to settlement of Iceland. In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, a *fornaldarsaga* that dates from the fourteenth or fifteenth century but includes some story components that can be found also in some early thirteenth-century sources, the dead warriors of the enemy of King Hrólfr *kraki* are reanimated in a battle.⁴⁶ The use of magic in the reanimation process is explicitly mentioned. The awakener of the dead, Queen Skuld, is said to be sitting on a *seiðhjallr*, a special scaffold for witches, who were thought to practice *seiðr*, a form of magic described in saga literature.⁴⁷

As a result of Skuld's magic, regardless of the number of enemies King Hrólfr and his men kill, their numbers never decrease, and the enemy soon overpowers the king's troops. One of king Hrólfr's champions called Böðvarr then notes that the fallen warriors must be rising over and over again to battle against them, undefeatable because the magic that reanimates them cannot be prevented:

Deep are the ranks of Skuld's army. I suspect that the dead are wandering about. They rise up again to fight against us, and it becomes difficult to fight with ghosts. As many limbs as we cleave, shields we split, helmets and mail coats as we hew apart, and war leaders we cut down, the encounters with the dead are the grimmest.⁴⁸

Böðvarr continues with a comment on his encounter with a dead warrior in battle, in which he describes how the enemy recovers from a fatal blow without Böðvarr being able to say what force it is that reanimated the corpse:

I [...] hacked off a hand and a foot. I landed another blow on his shoulder, slicing him down his side, for the length of his spine. His reaction was not even to sigh. It was as if he dozed for a time, and I thought him dead. Few men like him are to be found, for he fought afterward no less boldly than before, and I cannot say what it is that is driving him.⁴⁹

46 A component of the story of King Hrólfr *kraki* can also be found in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* (ca. 1200) as well as in *Ynglinga saga* (see below) and *Prose Edda*, which have both been attributed to Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241). Simek & Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 195.

47 *Hrólfs saga kraka* in *Hrólfs saga Kraka*, ed. D. Slay (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960), 119. Since *seiðr* magic has been extensively discussed in earlier research, I will not concentrate on the issue here. On *seiðr* see e.g. Dag Strömbäck, *Sejd och andra studier i nordisk själ-suppfattning* (Hedemora: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien för svensk folkkultur, Gidlunds förlag, 2000 [1935]); Neil S. Price, *The Viking Way. Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Uppsala: Dept. of Archaeology and Ancient History, 2002); Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic*.

48 [D]riugt er lidid Skulldar, og grunar mig nu að þeir dauðu sueimi hier, og rijse vpp aptur og beriest j móti oss, og mun það verða torsótt að beríast við drauga, og so margur leggur sem hier er klofinn, og skiöldur rifinn, hiálmur og brynja j smátt sundur höguinn, og margur höfðingi j sundur boladur, þa eru þeir nu grimmastir enu dauðu víður eignar. *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 120. Trans. Jesse L. Byock in *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 76.

49 [E]g hió af honum hönd og fót, og kom annað höggid áá öxl honum, og klauf eg so ofan með síjdunni, og með hriggnum, enn so brá honum við að hann anduarpadi ei, og

Before examining the possible reanimator of the dead and the degree of agency ascribed to the deceased in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, I will discuss *Sörla þátr*, which describes a similar episode: dead warriors who repeatedly rise again after being given a death blow. *Sörla þátr* survives in a late fourteenth-century manuscript Flateyjarbók (The Book of Flatey, GkS 1005 fol), written by the priests Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þórhallsson sometime between 1387 and 1390.⁵⁰ The story appears as part of a saga of King Óláfr Tryggvason (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*), believed by medieval Icelanders to be the Christianizer of Iceland. *Sörla þátr* tells of Heðinn who, incited by the pagan goddess Freyja in disguise, wishes to test his strength against a certain Högni. The men later become sworn brothers. Högni engages his only daughter Hildr to Heðinn, but despite this, again agitated by the pagan goddess, Heðinn chooses to kidnap Hildr and disgracefully kills Högni's wife. Högni chases Heðinn until they meet on an island. The two men and their armies start a battle known as *Hjaðningavíg* while Hildr watches.⁵¹ Since the pagan goddess (now named Göndul) has laid a curse on them with the help of the pagan god Óðinn, every fallen warrior is resurrected and the two armies keep on fighting for 143 years, until the Christian king Óláfr Tryggvason arrives on the island and one of his men destroys all the dead warriors.⁵²

The earliest surviving version of *Sörla þátr* is, as noted above, fairly late. This, and the late dating of *Hrólfs saga kraka* mentioned above indicate a possible late origin for the motif of dead warriors resurrected by magic or a magical curse. However, the distribution of the legend of Heðinn and Högni in several presumably older sources does cast doubt on this argument. As well as in Scandinavian sources, the battle is also alluded to in the Old English poems *Deor* and *Widsith*, both found in the late tenth-century Exeter Book.⁵³ *Deor* mentions only the name "Heodeningas," which has been seen as a reference to the Hjaðningar, "the followers of Heðinn," but gives no further information about the actual battle. *Widsith* speaks of "Hagena [who ruled] the Holmrycgas and Henden [who ruled] the Glomman" (*Hagena Holmrygum ond Heoden Glommum*), names that have been seen as indicating Högni and Heðinn or Hjaðningar in the Old Icelandic story, but does not mention the never-ending battle.⁵⁴

so sem hann sofnadi vmm stund, enn eg hugdi hann daudann, og fæir munu slíkir finnast, og ei bardist hann síðan ódjarfligar enn áður, og alldrei kann eg ad seigia huad hann eflir. *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 121–122. Trans. Byock, *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki*, 77.

50 Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir, "Flateyjarbók," in *Medieval Scandinavia*, 197–198.

51 Olav Bø, "Hjaðningavíg," in *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid från vikingatid till reformationstid*, 4 (Helsingfors; Malmö: Örnförlaget, Allhem).

52 *Sörla þátr* in Flateyjarbók. *En samling af Norske Konge-sagaer med indskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt annaler*, 1, ed. Carl Rikard Unger (Christiania: [s.n.], 1860–1868), 275–283.

53 Kemp Malone, "An Anglo-Latin Version of the Hjaðningavíg," *Speculum* 39.1 (1964): 35–44; Christine Fell, "Perceptions of Transience," in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 172–189; Leonard Neidorf, "The Dating of Widsith and the Study of Germanic Antiquity," *Neophilologus* 97 (2013): 165–183.

54 Malone, "An Anglo-Latin Version of the Hjaðningavíg," 40–41.

Consequently, these older insular sources do not offer additional information on the duration of the clash or on the potential magic or supernatural powers that may have been held responsible for the endless fight, so we do not know whether such a motif was known to either of the writers of *Deor* or *Widsith*. In earlier studies it has been suggested that the story known to them did not entail supernatural elements, a motif that certainly would have merited a mention in the text. Instead, the story would have been known as a heroic tale in which the opponents both died in the battle and no never-ending conflict ensued.⁵⁵ As matters stand, the somewhat later Scandinavian sources articulate the story in greater detail.

The legend of the never-ending battle of Heðinn and Högni has been attested, as well as in *Sörla þáttr*, in Saxo Grammaticus's (ca. 1150–ca. 1220) *Gesta Danorum*, written around 1200, and the *Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson, which dates from the early thirteenth century, in its middle part known as *Skáldskaparmál*.⁵⁶ Some fourteenth-century copies of the last-mentioned source, *Skáldskaparmál*, contain fragments of a poem called *Ragnarsdrápa*, estimated to date from the ninth or late tenth centuries on philological grounds. *Skáldskaparmál* also contains a prose section that recites the story. The battle is said to have continued until the end of the world, *Ragnarök*. In both *Ragnarsdrápa* and the prose section, the dead warriors in the two armies are said to have been raised by Hildr, the daughter of Högni. In the *Skáldskaparmál* of the *Prose Edda* manuscript DG 11 4to, known as the Uppsala Edda and dating from circa 1300–1350, for instance, it is stated:

Then they began the battle that is known as the Hjaðnings' weather, and they fought all that day. In the evening they went to their ships. But Hildr went during the night and woke up by magic all the men that had fallen during the day. The next day the kings went ashore and fought, and so did all those that had fallen the previous day. The battle went on one day after another so that all the men that fell and all the weapons that lay there on the battlefield then turned to stone, and shields too. And when day came all the dead men got up and fought, and so it all goes on until the twilight of the gods [i.e. Ragnarök].⁵⁷

55 See Malone, "An Anglo-Latin Version of the Hjaðningavíg," 44.

56 Simek & Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 309–310. See e.g. in Codex Regius Gks 2367 4to (ca. 1300–1350): Finnur Jónsson, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* (Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk forlag: København, 1931), 155. On the manuscript, see <http://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/GKS04-2367>. (Accessed June 3, 2016). It has also been suggested that the image stone at Stora Hammar on Gotland can be interpreted as depicting the legend of this never-ending battle, but the interpretation of this pictorial evidence (which appears to build especially on the fact that a woman is depicted standing between a group of armed warriors and a longship manned with similarly armed men) needs to be discussed in full and this cannot be done here, because of lack of space. See Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991), 128–130.

57 Þá hófu þeir þá orrostu er Hjaðningaveðr er kallat ok börðust þann dag allan. At kveldi fóru þeir til skipa. En Hildr gekk um nóttina ok vakti upp með fjölkyngi alla þá menn er um daginn höfðu fallit. Annan dag gengu konungar á land ok börðust, ok svá allir þeir er fellu enn fyrra dag. Fór svá orrostan hvern dag eptir annan at allir menn <er> fellu ok öll vápn er þar lágu á vígvelli þá urðu at grjóti ok svá hlífár. Ok er dagaði stóðu

In *Gesta Danorum*, a history of the Danes written around 1200 in Latin by the Danish writer and cleric Saxo Grammaticus, who also mentions Icelanders as preservers of old lore and thus as some of the sources of his stories, the battle between the two men (here: Hithinus and Höginus) is not never-ending from its beginning, although magic is again involved. Instead, the men do not kill each other in the first battle, but seven years later in another battle. According to *Gesta Danorum* it is again Hildir (Hilda) who wakes up the dead with her incantations, since she is said to have loved her husband so much: “They say that Hilda longed so ardently for her husband, that she is believed to have conjured up the spirits of the combatants by her spells in the night in order to renew the war.”⁵⁸ As a consequence, the battle continues every night.

In all the above-discussed examples the dead warriors appear as more or less passive, even subordinate objects who cannot have an effect on whether they will be resurrected or not. In *Sörla þáttur*, one of the two opponents, Heðinn, does give the Christian man who finally puts an end to the never-ending battle advice on how to deal with the problem: he should kill his adversary, Högni, first and then all the other warriors and finally him, Heðinn, who is willing to give up the fight. The Christian man succeeds in doing this, and the never-ending battle finally ceases.⁵⁹ Although Heðinn the dead warrior knows the solution, the text makes clear that he is nevertheless an object that is controlled and incapable of preventing the resurrection of the two armies, including the reanimation of his own corpse. Like Glámr above, the armies at *Hjaðningavíg* and King Hrólfr’s battle are both portrayed as somewhat passive. However, unclean spirits are not mentioned as the reanimating power, but instead magic and the influence of the pagan gods is explicitly referred to. I will continue by discussing whether the view of the reanimating power reflects the Christian attitudes of the writer and his or her intention to demonize the origin of ghosts.

Demonized practice of (pseudo)pagan magic?

As explained above, *Hrólfs saga kraka* indicates that some kind of magic is involved since a person skilled in witchcraft (*gerningar*) and capable of *seiðr* magic is

allir upp inir dauðu menn ok börðust, ok ferr svá allt til Ragnarökkrs. Heímir Pálsson (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson: The Uppsala Edda DG 11 4to* (Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2012), 234. Trans. Anthony Faulkes in *Snorri Sturluson: The Uppsala Edda*, 235. For the Codex Regius version (Gks 2367 4to) and *Ragnarsdrápa* see Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 154–155; Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Den Norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, B:1 (København: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1973 [1912–1915]), 2–3.

58 Ferunt Hildam tanta mariti cupiditate flagrasse, ut noctu interfectorum manes reintegrandi belli gracia carminibus excitasse credatur. Alfred Holder (ed.), *Saxo Grammaticus: Saxonis Grammatici Gesta Danorum* (Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1886), 160. Trans. Oliver Elton in *The Danish History* (Norroena Society, New York, 1905). Electronically available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1150/1150-h/1150-h.htm>. (Accessed July 12, 2016).

59 *Sörla þáttur*, 282–283.

mentioned as sitting on her platform, suggesting she may have been performing rituals designed to wake the dead. Additionally, it is implied that some supernatural power is involved. Böðvarr suspects that the pagan god Óðinn is responsible; in the midst of the dead warriors, he declares: “I do not recognize [Óð]in[n] among them [the enemy warriors], although I strongly suspect that this foul and unfaithful son of the evil one will be hovering in the background and causing us harm.”⁶⁰ Unlike in *Sörla þáttr*, no óðinnic curse is explicitly mentioned in *Hrólfs saga kraka*.

However, since in *Sörla þáttr* Óðinn appears as the ultimate power that makes the curse work, his role in the reanimation of the dead army is worth investigating.⁶¹ In the mythological context, Skuld, Göndul (the name used for the goddess Freyja in *Sörla þáttr*), and Hildr are also names for valkyries – mythical female figures who chose those who died in battles to be taken to Valhalla, “hall of the slain” ruled by Óðinn. By doing this, they contributed to the number of the *einherjar* of Óðinn, that is the army of warriors who would follow Óðinn to participate in the final battle, *Ragnarök*.⁶² This means that in the mythological context all the above-named women who were mentioned as responsible for the reanimation of the dead were associated with Óðinn.

Óðinn himself is associated with the dead in other mythological contexts. The thirteenth-century *Ynglinga saga* was based on an oral poem, *Ynglingatal*, a list of ancient kings of the Yngling family, and the above-mentioned Latin history of Norwegian kings, *Historia Norvegiae*. It is a quasi-historical work that recites stories of ancient mythical kings of Scandinavia and euhemerized the pagan gods, including Óðinn, who was held to be one of the ancestors of Scandinavian kings.⁶³ *Ynglinga saga* says that he arrived from “Asia” and settled in the ancient realm of Sigtuna in Sweden. The saga further explains the skills of Óðinn and his connection with magic and the dead. Óðinn himself is mentioned as skilled in the craft of *seiðr* (after adopting this skill from the goddess Freyja).⁶⁴ The saga also associates him with other special skills. According to *Ynglinga saga*, “sometimes he awakened the dead from the earth or sat himself under hanged men. Because of this he was called *draugadróttinn* (i.e. the lord of ghosts) or *hangadróttinn* (the lord of the hanged).”⁶⁵ The

60 [E]nn Óðinn kann eg ecki að kienna hier, enn mæir er þó mesti grunur áá að hann muni hier sueima j móti oss herianz sonurinn enn fvle og ótrúe. *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 122. Trans. Byock, *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki*, 77.

61 See also Kemp Malone, “An Anglo-Latin Version of the *Hjaðningavíg*,” 40.

62 The names are mentioned as valkyrie names, e.g. in the thirteenth-century manuscript of the Eddic poem *Völuspá*: Sá hon valkyrior, / vítt um kornnar, / gorvar at ríða, / til Goðþjóðar; / Sculd helt scildi, / en Scögul önnor, / Gunnr, Hildr, Göndul / oc Geirscögul. *Völuspá*, stanza 30 in Gustav Neckel (ed.), *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1962), 7. See also Malone, “An Anglo-Latin Version of the *Hjaðningavíg*,” 40, 44.

63 On *Ynglinga saga*, see Gad Rausing, “Ynglinga saga,” in *Medieval Scandinavia*, 739–740.

64 *Ynglinga saga* in *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbarnarson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1941), 11, 13, 16.

65 [E]n stundum vakði hann upp dauða menn ór jörðu eða settisk undir hanga. Fyrir því var hann kallaðr draugadróttinn eða hangadróttinn. *Ynglinga saga*, 18; Trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes in *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla, 1: The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason* (Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2011), 10.

saga adds: “Óðinn [...] knew songs which would make the [...] grave-mounds open up before him, and with words alone he would bind those who were in them and go in and take from there whatever he wanted.”⁶⁶ Therefore *Ynglinga saga* associates Óðinn with waking dead – an act that was often linked also to gaining wisdom from the dead, as I shall discuss below – and opening grave-mounds with his incantations, as well as practicing *seiðr* magic.

The skills of Óðinn listed above have often been associated with pre-Christian beliefs, but this view has been criticized, as we will see below.⁶⁷ Earlier studies have also shown that the picture of the pagan god in *Ynglinga saga* or many other Old Icelandic sources was not unaffected by Christian influence. In thirteenth-century Iceland, the context within which the *Ynglinga saga* was compiled, the characteristics of Óðinn (including the capability to raise the dead) resembled those ascribed to the Devil in *Elucidarius*, as pointed out by Jón Helgason and Anette Lassen. Moreover, in some saga sources it is suggested that the Devil could appear in the shape of Óðinn.⁶⁸ In *Ynglinga saga* the picture of Óðinn is, in Clive Tolley’s words, that of “a pagan magician, rather than a real god.”⁶⁹

The sources obviously reveal Christian influence and create a tradition of Óðinn who is synonymous with the Devil and who, together with women whose valkyrie names associate them with him, appear responsible for the reanimation of the dead in the sources discussed above. Unlike the Devil in *Elucidarius*, however, Óðinn and his valkyries use spells, curses, and magic to raise the dead. No unclean spirits enter the corpses. Still, the result is the same as in *Grettis saga*: the dead become physical revenants that have lost at least some of their own will, and are therefore in the process of becoming subordinate objects. Although the explicitly mentioned witchcraft seems the primus motor of posthumous activity in both *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Sörla þáttur*, the devil-like Óðinn is also involved; at the very least, the devilish origin of reanimation is not explicitly denied.

Moreover, to a greater or lesser extent, *Gesta Danorum*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and *Sörla þáttur* all have an ecclesiastical origin, which makes Christian influence on the views of reanimation all the more likely. Saxo Grammaticus, the writer of *Gesta Danorum* was a cleric. *Sörla þáttur* in Flateyjarbók was copied by two clerics, and the possible place of origin of the texts copied in it was Þingeyrar monastery in Iceland.⁷⁰ In *Hrólfs saga kraka* reference is made to “meisterinn Galterus,” that is Gautier de Châtillon (Walter of Châtillon), a twelfth-century French theologian and the writer of *Alexandreis*, which was also translated in Iceland in the thirteenth century

66 Óðinn [...] kunni þau ljóð, er upp lausk fyrir honum [...] haugarnir, ok batt hann með orðum einum þá, er fyrir þjöggu, ok gekk inn ok tók þar slíkt, er hann vildi. *Ynglinga saga*, 19; Trans. Finlay and Faulkes, *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla*, 11.

67 See e.g. Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic*, 589.

68 See Anette Lassen, *Odin på kristent pergament. En teksthistorisk studie* (København: Museum Tusculanum, 2011), 253–254.

69 Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic*, 513.

70 There is evidence that its scribes copied the sagas without adjusting them much. Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir, “Flateyjarbók.”

by the Icelander Brandr Jónsson (d. 1264), the abbot of the Augustinian monastery in Þykkvabær (1247–1262) and later bishop of Hólar (1263–1264), and known as *Alexanders saga*.⁷¹ In other words, all the above-named sources were linked to ecclesiastical institutions and clerical writers and scribes, who could consider óðinnic (*seiðr*) magic a pagan practice and Óðinn himself synonymous with the Devil.⁷² The intention of the writers and copyists (although not necessarily of the readers and listeners) may well have been to emphasize the passive nature of the dead and the devilish origin of reanimated corpses.

The absence of unclean spirits that would conform well to the explanation of the living dead given in *Elucidarius* and the use of magic instead raises the possibility of other explanations for the reanimating power. Notions of clerical authorship or at least copying and emphasis on magic is also of great interest, bearing in mind that in medieval Europe necromancy, and divination involving the dead, was a skill that required Latin learning and was usually ascribed to the clerical elite.⁷³ Accordingly, the question of whether medieval Icelandic clerics or saga writers had information on necromantic practices that may have affected their view of posthumous restlessness is of great interest.

Latin necromancy in Iceland

In medieval Iceland magical skills were often associated with learned priests. For instance, the first known Icelander to have studied abroad, presumably in Paris in the eleventh century, the priest Sæmundr Sigfússon (1056–1133) or Sæmundr the Wise (*inn fróði*), was thought by his contemporaries and descendants to possess magical skills.⁷⁴ These magical skills need not have included necromancy, but are likely to have included healing skills or other special skills that were mastered only by a select few, such as writing the Latin alphabet: that is, the skills involved knowledge obtained in European universities that appeared to medieval Icelanders as magical and awe-inspiring.⁷⁵

71 Richard L. Harris, “The Lion-Knight Legend in Iceland and the Valþjófsstaðir Door,” *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 1 (1971): 125–145, here 140–141; Simek & Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 7.

72 On the demonic qualities of Óðinn, see Lassen, *Odin på kristent pergament*, 143–144, 162–163; on pagan and Christian magic, see e.g. Stephen A. Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 43–51.

73 Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*, 3; Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites. A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), 1; Michael D. Bailey, “From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 76.4 (2001): 960–990, here 965–966.

74 Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, “Sæmundr Fróði. A Medieval Master of Magic,” *ARV. Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 50 (1994): 117–132.

75 On writing as a form of magic in medieval Europe see also e.g. Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions. Tales of Magic, Marriage and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 88, 91–94, 99–102. On writing magic in Old Icelandic context, see also p. [63] and footnote 94 below on rune magic.

It is possible, however, that through their contacts on the continent, some learned clergymen in Iceland may have become aware of the art of necromancy as well.⁷⁶ There is evidence of clerical magic in other later Scandinavian contexts, so knowledge of the art of necromancy may have spread to the North through ecclesiastical channels. Stephen Mitchell, for instance, mentions in his study of medieval Scandinavian witchcraft the Danish archbishop Jens Grand who died in 1327, in Avignon. He had studied in Paris and possessed a large library. According to the Danish king Erik Menved (who had a long dispute with the archbishop), among the books was one about raising the dead, perhaps a *liber necromanticus*.⁷⁷ Medieval clerical interest in the raising of the dead and the art of necromancy becomes especially intriguing in the light of later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century folklore, which includes, according to Terry Gunnell, several stories of Lutheran priests who raised the dead from their graves and wrestled with them in order to get the upper hand over the deceased and make them obey commands.⁷⁸ Later folklore does not necessarily reflect medieval beliefs, but the clerical connection made in the later material may echo the medieval worldview to some extent, if that included an understanding of Christian priests as magicians who woke the deceased for magical purposes, an idea that had started to gain ground when Iceland was Christianized.

An excerpt in *Færeyinga saga* (the Saga of the Faroe Islanders) suggests that Latin necromantic practices in particular had indeed reached Iceland by the time the saga was compiled. According to scholarly estimations, *Færeyinga saga* dates from the beginning of the thirteenth century, but the excerpt involving necromantic practices that is discussed below survives only in the above-mentioned late fourteenth-century Flateyjarbók.⁷⁹ The story tells of three men – Einarr, Þórir, and Sigmundur – who die in suspicious circumstances. Their kinsman Þrándr, who is skilled in magic, performs special rituals to find out what happened to them. The saga gives a detailed description of the rituals:

Þrándr had had a great fire kindled in the fire-house, and has four lattices set up, one at each corner and Þrándr draws nine squares out all ways from the lattices. He sits down on a stool between the fire and the lattices. He bids no

76 The word *nígrómantía* itself is used e.g. in the younger version of *Bragða-Mágus saga* (*Mágus saga jarls*), an original *riddarasaga* from the middle of the fourteenth century. *Bragða-Mágus saga* in *Bragða-Mágus saga*, ed. Gunnlaugur Þórðarson (Kaupmannahöfn: Páll Sveinsson, 1858), 37. On the saga, see Jürg Glauser, “Bragða-Mágus saga,” in *Medieval Scandinavia*, 402–403; Simek & Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 259–260. This may, however, indicate Latin *nigromantia* as a black art and not *necromantia*, although in the medieval European context *nigromantia* and *necromantia* were often considered equivalent. Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*, 105 (for necromancy in Saxo) and 208 (footnote 13); Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 4, 19.

77 Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*, 46–48 and 226 (footnote 47).

78 Gunnell, “Waking the Dead,” 251.

79 Peter Foote, *Aurvandilstá. Norse Studies* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1984), 209; Simek & Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 88.

man speak to him, and they do as he bid them. Þrándr sits so for a time, and after a while there walks a man into the fire-house and he was dripping wet. They know the man for Einarr the Hebridean. He walks up to the fire and stretches out his hands to it for a short time, then turns and goes out again. After a while another man walks into the fire-house. He walks up to the fire, stretches his hands to it, and then goes out. They knew him for Þórir. Soon after that a third man comes into the fire-house. He was a big man, all bloody he was. He had his head in his hand. They all know him for Sigmundr Brestisson. He stands for a while on the floor, and then goes out again.⁸⁰

After the episode, Þrándr rises from his seat, draws a deep breath and announces the manner of death of all three men.

The excerpt contains elements considered typical of native Scandinavian magic, which have been elaborated in previous discussions and that, for that reason, I will not discuss here.⁸¹ Important for this study is the setting up of lattices (*grindr*) and drawing the squares (*reitar*) before the dead men are summoned, which both obviously indicate some kind of boundary or even protective barrier and can be construed as apotropaic measures of some kind.⁸² Although in the shape of a square, this detail is especially intriguing in the light of Richard Kieckhefer's argument that the use of similar magic circles and spheres was originally part of clerical necromancy, intended to prevent the summoned spirit or ghost from crossing the created boundary. Although magic circles have been attested in popular tradition as well, according to Kieckhefer they were not originally part of lay beliefs and practices, but reveal influence from clerical necromancy.⁸³

Various physical obstacles are used in saga literature to restrict the movement of revenants (albeit often with poor outcomes), and some archaeological discoveries possibly indicate a similar practice among Germanic tribes.⁸⁴ Still, the link with circles and spheres in necromancy seems too clear to be avoided. Peter Foote, who has studied the episode in *Færeyinga saga* in depth, notes a story of St Barbatús in the Old Icelandic saga of Virgin Mary, *Mariu saga*, a biography often attributed to the Icelandic cleric Kygri-Björn Hjaltason (d. 1237 or 1238), that was based on

80 Þrándr hafde þá latit gera ellda mykla j elldaskala ok grindr fíorar lætr hann gera með fíorum hornnum ok .ix. reita rístr Þrándr alla uega vt frá grindunum. En hann setzst a stol mílle elldz ok grindanna. Hann bídr þá nu ekki víd sig tala ok þeir gera suo. Þrándr sítr suo vm hírd ok er stund leídr þá gengr maðr inn j elldaskalann ok var allr aluotr. Þeir kenna manninn at þar var Æinarr Sudreyingr. Hann gengr at elldinum ok rettir at hendr sínar ok lítla hírd ok snyrr vt eftir þat. Ok er stund lídr gengr maðr jnn j elldahusit. Hann gengr att elldre ok rettir til hendr sínar ok gengr vt sídan. Þeir kendu at þar var Þórir. Bratt eftir þetta gengr hinn þríde maðr j elldaskalann. Þessi var mikill maðr ok míog blódugr. Hann hafde hófudít j hende sér. Þenna kenna þeir aller at þar var Sigmundr Brestisson hann nemur starar nokkura stund a golfinu ok gengr vt sídan. *Færeyinga saga*, in *Flateyjarbók*, 556.

81 See e.g. Foote, *Aurvandilstá*, 209–221.

82 See also Foote, *Aurvandilstá*, 213–219.

83 Kieckhefer, *Forbidden rites*, 170.

84 See e.g. Foote, *Aurvandilstá*, 215–216.

several known and unknown sources and commentaries, the earliest surviving manuscript of which dates from the early thirteenth century.⁸⁵ In this saga, the saint accuses a certain Romaldus of conjuring up the devil, and his practice is described. It resembles the rituals in *Færeyinga saga* in that squares are likewise drawn on the ground.⁸⁶ The sequence in *Færeyinga saga* may well reflect the indigenous tradition represented by the setting up of physical barriers to prevent corpses from returning, but as it describes the drawing of squares it also shows traces of clerical influence and foreign learning.⁸⁷

The element of Latin necromancy may have been a late adaption in the Flateyjarbók version of *Færeyinga saga*. With or without that element, like the reanimated dead warriors, the dead who are summoned in *Færeyinga saga* appear largely passive; they are summoned to join the living for a moment. They do not appear of their own free will, even though the third man, Sigmundr, has been murdered, as Þrándr finds out during the session.⁸⁸ This is an act that in Old Icelandic context required revenge or compensation, and could have been considered a good motive for Sigmundr to return of his own free will.⁸⁹ Again, there is no reference to unclean spirits and only implications of magic remain. Nevertheless, the sources do not imply that the motif of submissive corpses originated in native beliefs, but may point to learned ecclesiastical spheres as its origin. Before making any further conclusions, however, some discussion of whether indigenous necromantic practices existed in medieval Iceland is required, so it is to the native tradition of waking up the dead that I turn next.

Waking up the dead in the poetic tradition

The belief in the ability of people to wake up the dead or at least communicate with them in some manner may have been part of medieval Icelandic folk tradition as well.⁹⁰ The elements of this tradition may have differed from what has been said above about the tradition that was influenced by foreign learning and literature and Latin necromancy. Both Eddic poetry and *fornaldarsögur* offer examples of communication with the dead. The Eddic poem *Baldrs draumar* survives in a

85 The sources of the saga consisted of e.g. apocryphal gospels, the canonical gospels of Matthew and Luke, Flavius Josephus's *Antiquitates Judaicae*, the Old Testament authorities, St Augustine, and Gregory the Great, among others. See Wilhelm Heizmann, "Máriu saga," in *Medieval Scandinavia*, 407–408.

86 Foote, *Aurvardilstá*, 214.

87 On physical obstacles intended to prevent corpses from returning, see also Kanerva, "Rituals for the Restless Dead," 215, 217.

88 *Færeyinga saga*, 556–557.

89 On the medieval Icelandic blood feud tradition, see William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking. Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

90 On the presence of the dead in medieval culture in general, and the continuing bonds and relationship with the dead, for instance through commemoration and prayers, see also Patrick Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 80–87.

fourteenth-century manuscript, but is thought to date from the late twelfth century.⁹¹ The poem brings us back to Óðinn as the reanimator of corpses. It depicts Óðinn waking up a dead seeress or sibyl called *völva*:

[st 4] Then Odin rode by the eastern doors, / where he knew the seeress's grave to be; / he began to speak a corpse-reviving spell for the wise woman, / until reluctantly she rose, spoke these corpse-words: [st 5] 'Which man is that, unknown to me, / who is making me travel this difficult road? / I was snowed upon, I was rained upon, / dew fell on me, dead I've been for a long time.'⁹²

The *völva* is clearly reluctant to wake up, but cannot resist Óðinn's spells, presumably those that he boasts about in another Eddic poem, *Hávamál*, which dates from the twelfth or early thirteenth century. It probably preserves old oral material, but has also been influenced by Christian and classical learning known in the Middle Ages, such as the collection of proverbial wisdom *Disticha Catonis*.⁹³ *Hávamál* states in its stanza 157: "I know a twelfth one [i.e. spell] if I see, up in a tree, / a dangling corpse in a noose: / I can so carve and colour the runes / that the man walks / and talks with me."⁹⁴ What these spells were is not indicated, but the formula used in other sources suggests that the intention was merely to *wake up* the deceased.

Hyndluljóð is an Eddic poem preserved only in the late fourteenth-century Flateyjarbók, although the poem itself may be older; it probably dates from the twelfth or thirteenth century, but is influenced by Christian vision literature. In the poem, the goddess Freyja wakes up a wise, even witchlike giantess called Hyndla to gain information for her protégée Óttarr about his forefather. She does this

91 Fredrik J. Heinemann, "Baldrs draumar," in *Medieval Scandinavia*, 28; Mats Malm, "Baldrs draumar: Literally and Literarily," in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society. Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference 2–7 July 2000, University of Sydney*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (University of Sydney, 2000). Electronically available at http://www.sagaconference.org/SC11/SC11_Malm.pdf. (Accessed July 12, 2016).

92 [4] Þá reið Óðinn / fyr austan dyrr, / þar er hann vissi / völo leiði; / nam hann vittugri / valgaldr qveða, / unz nauðig reis, / nás orð um qvað: [5] "Hvat er manna þat, / mér ókunnra, / er mér hefir aukit, / erfit sinni? / Var ec snivin snióvi / oc slegin regni / oc drifin döggö, / dauð var ec lengi." *Baldrs draumar*, in *Edda*, 277. Trans. Carolyne Larrington in *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 243.

93 Simek & Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 165–166, 198.

94 [157] Þat kann ec iþ tólpta, / ef ec sé á tré uppi / váfa virgilná: / svá ec ríst / oc í rúnom fāc, / at sá gengr gumi / oc mælir við mic. *Hávamál* in *Edda*, 43. Trans. Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 37. An interesting parallel (spells, carving and runes) can be found in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* (Book I), which tells of a giantess called Harthgrepa ("hard-grip") and her protégée, King Hadingus, whom she initiates into the art of necromancy. The text tells how Hadingus places "a stick carved with spells," in the light of *Hávamál* possibly runes, under the corpse's tongue. John Lindow, *Norse Mythology. A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 163.

simply by bidding her to wake up: “Wake up, girl of girls, wake up, my friend, / Hyndla, sister, who lives in the rock cave!”⁹⁵

A similar simple formula appears in the fairly young (thirteenth- or fourteenth-century) Eddic poem *Grógaldr* (Gróa’s spell) and in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs* (a *fornaldarsaga*). In *Grógaldr*, a heroic young man, Svipdagr, wakes up his dead mother to gain protection for his future trip, again simply by bidding her to wake up: “Wake up, Gróa! Wake up good woman! At the gates of death I wake you! If you remember that your son bids you to come to your grave-mound.”⁹⁶ *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs* dates from the middle of the thirteenth century, and is extant in late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century manuscripts.⁹⁷ The saga tells of a sword forged and cursed by dwarves, owned by the famous warrior Angantýr, who dies in battle and is buried on an island called Sámsey. The daughter of Angantýr, Hervör, is more interested in waging war than doing women’s work, and together with her crew she travels to Sámsey and alone enters Angantýr’s mound and wakes up her dead father. The saga then recites a poem that describes the talk between the dead father and his daughter, but again, the daughter merely wakes up her father: “Wake, Angantýr! / wakes you Hervör, / Sváfa’s offspring / your only daughter; / the keen-edged blade / from the barrow give me, / the sword dwarf-smithied / for Sigrlami.”⁹⁸

Characteristic of all of these examples is that the deceased is merely “woken up”; the awakener says “*vaki þú*”, “wake up, you” and identifies him or herself and the deceased who is awoken, and, like Hervör, indicates the reason why the dead has been raised from his or her sleep. The formula both parallels and differs from that in medieval European Latin necromancy. In Latin necromancy conjurations included, like the Old Icelandic examples above, addressing the conjured spirit by name. However, the Icelandic formula differs from the formula used in Latin necromancy in one respect. The verb *vaka*, to awaken, is in imperative mood (*vaki þú*), but the familiar and friendly tone of the formula (e.g. “wake up, my friend”, “wake up good woman”) signals equality, even respect. As Richard Kieckhefer has shown, in Latin necromancy, conjurations were a central part of many magic

95 [1] *Vaki, mær meya, / vaki, mín vina, / Hyndla systir, / er í helli býr. Hyndluljóð* in *Edda*, 288. Trans. Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 253. On the poem, see A. Ya. Gurevich, “Hyndluljóð,” in *Medieval Scandinavia*, 309; Simek & Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 202.

96 *Vaki þú, Gróa! / vaki þú, góð kona! / vek ek þik dauðra dura; / ef þú þat mant, / at þú þinn mög bæðir / til kumbldysjar koma. Grógaldr* in *Norraen Fornkvaedi: Islands samling af folkelige oldtidsdigte, almindeligt kaldet Edda*, ed. Sophus Bugge (Christiania: [s.n.], 1867), 338. On the poem, see Lotte Motz, “Svipdagsmál,” in *Medieval Scandinavia*, 629; Simek & Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 131.

97 Omeljan Pritsak, “Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs,” in *Medieval Scandinavia*, 283; Simek & Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, 178–179.

98 *Vaki þú, Angantýr, / vekr þik Hervör, / eingadóttir / ykkir Sváfu; / seldu ór haugi / hvassan mæki, / þann er Sigrlama / slógu dvergar. Hervarar saga* in *The saga of King Heidrek the Wise. Saga Heiðreks konungs ins Vítra*, ed. and trans. Christopher Tolkien (London: Nelson, 1960), 14. The fairly long-lasting interaction between Hervör and her dead father is expressed in the saga in poetic form. The poetry provides sufficient material for a case study in its own right, but only one perspective has been taken here.

formulas that were intended to make various spirits or ghosts serve the ends of the conjurer. Terms such as “*coniuro, adiuro* and *exorcizo*,” that is words that connote commanding, were used, and compliance was expected from the spirits. In addition, the conjurer could invoke various subjects of power, such as God, the saints, angels or the Virgin Mary, whose power could be wielded against the spirit to make it obedient.⁹⁹

As mentioned already above, *Ynglinga saga* does ascribe to Óðinn the skill of *binding* mound-dwellers with words and going in to take what he wanted, suggesting that he is commanding the dead spirits.¹⁰⁰ However, in his study of Old Norse shamanism Clive Tolley has shown that *Ynglinga saga* drew heavily on *Historia Norvegie* and its twelfth-century description of Sámi magic, which Scandinavians had some awareness of and which *HN* presented from the perspective of Scandinavian Christians who considered the Sámi people pagans.¹⁰¹ What looks like commanding the dead may actually refer to the practice of Sami shamans who were thought capable of finding hidden treasures and retrieving lost objects, for instance *in the mounds*, rather than implying that Óðinn exerted control over the deceased.¹⁰² In other words, the skill ascribed to Óðinn may not serve as evidence that native Icelandic expected the dead to comply to the wishes of their awakeners. Instead, the friendly and persuasive tone of the awakeners in Old Icelandic sources suggests that communication with the dead was considered reciprocal.¹⁰³

In this case, when woken from the dead the *völva*, the giantess, and Angantýr may not have been considered passive, compliant, and subordinate at all; instead the relationship between the dead and their awakeners in the three examples would have been like that of two equals, and, as a consequence, posed a threat to the awakener as I will elaborate further below.

Who are the awakened and how do they behave?

In the examples discussed above, the dead are merely “awakened,” and although people who communicated with the dead were obviously expected to stay alert so that the dead could cause no harm, the relationship between the living and the dead appears, surprisingly, as that of two equals.¹⁰⁴ The way the living speak to

99 Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 126–149.

100 *Ynglinga saga*, 19.

101 Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic*, 61–65, 75, 507–513, 589.

102 *Ibid.*, 77, 259, 265–266, 513.

103 For such reciprocal communication in other cultural contexts (here Finno-Baltic), see Eila Stepanova, “Reflections of Belief Systems in Karelian and Lithuanian Laments. Shared Systems of Traditional Referentiality?” *Archaeologia Baltica* 15 (2011): 136–137.

104 Since in *Íslendingasögur* and many of the *fornaldarsögur* the aim in the encounters with the restless dead was to *destroy* the reanimated corpse that was harassing the living, there was, naturally, a need to conquer and control the dead. In sagas the process of conquering and controlling could involve e.g. wrestling with the corpse and/or decapitating it and destroying the dead body by burning. The dead destroyed in this way are rarely approached to gain information from them – at least not explicitly – as in the examples

the deceased is often fairly polite, not commanding, as if to appease or curry favor with the deceased before requesting information or help. For instance, in *Hyndluljóð* Freyja calls the dead giantess a friend. The equality between the living and the dead – or even the dominance of the deceased over the living – is suggested in both *Baldrs draumar* and *Hyndluljóð*. In these Eddic poems, the dead who have been awakened also possess power over the living and are eager to harm those who have summoned them. Like many of the strong-willed revenants in *Íslendingasögur*, they appear malevolent in character – which is not surprising when they have been made to “travel this difficult road” from the otherworld to this world, as the irritated *völva* says to Óðinn in *Baldrs draumar*. The living wake the dead to gain wisdom and knowledge (and possibly to influence their own future).¹⁰⁵ However, in *Baldrs draumar* and *Hyndluljóð* the *völva* and the giantess both appear to lay a curse on their awakeners with a conditional prophecy: by pronouncing a future destiny that promises them harm, agony, and sorrow.¹⁰⁶

In *Baldrs draumar*, for instance, the *völva* finally recognizes that it is Óðinn who has awakened her, and though not directly laying a curse, her utterance resembles one in that she reminds the god of the approach of the end of the world, *Ragnarök*, in which Óðinn and all the pagan gods will be destroyed.¹⁰⁷ In *Hyndluljóð*, despite Freyja’s friendly tone, the giantess expresses her anger and tells Freyja to clear off, mocking her, laying a curse on her protégé and accusing her of promiscuity, thus showing that she is aware of the characteristics associated with Freyja that medieval Icelandic readers and listeners were also aware of.¹⁰⁸ The dead appear as powerful agents that may grant information, but are also capable of harming all those who have approached them. They do not resemble the “brainless zombies” of the resurrected armies who cannot oppose the agents who are responsible for their reanimation.

As in other saga sources, some of the above-mentioned dead who are summoned to gain information, protection, or treasure are benevolent towards the living, however. In *Grógaldur*, the deceased is not malicious: once the mother wakes up she chants nine charms that are intended to protect her son who has called

discussed above. Instead they return to intervene in the lives of the living and cause all kinds of harm. They had to be destroyed to restore the social equilibrium. See e.g. Kanerva, “Role of the Dead”.

105 Malm, “*Baldrs draumar*”; John McKinnell, “Wisdom from the Dead: The Ljóðatal section of *Hávamál*,” *Medium Aevum* 76 (2007): 85–115.

106 On the prophecies and curses of the *völva* seeress, see John McKinnell, “Encounters with *Völur*,” in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society. Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference 2–7 July 2000, University of Sydney*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (University of Sydney, 2000). Electronically available at http://www.sagaconference.org/SC11/SC11_McKinnell.pdf (Accessed July 12, 2016). It is possible that the *völva* and the giantess are capable of doing this because they find out or know the name of their awakener.

107 *Baldrs draumar*, 279.

108 *Hyndluljóð*, 295–296. As in examples in Eddic poetry discussed above, Glámr the ghost in *Grettis saga* lays a curse on Grettir by telling him his future destiny, before Grettir is able to decapitate him.

upon her. Unlike in the other examples, the mother herself has requested her son to ask for her help should he ever need advice, as attested in the first stanza of the poem. There the mother, Gróa, is very much a benevolent dead person.¹⁰⁹ In *Hervarar saga*, at first it appears as if the dead Angantýr will taunt his daughter and Hervör threatens her father with consequences should he not give her his sword. However, by the end of their interaction the father has acted more protectively in that he has warned her about the curse linked to the sword, and Hervör lets the dead continue their rest: “May you all lie unharmed / in the howe resting.”¹¹⁰ In both of the above examples, the deceased and the persons who wake them up are kin, which may partly explain the generosity and goodwill.¹¹¹

All the examples above indicate the might and power possessed by the dead and their apparently strong will. Henceforth, even though Óðinn and Freyja, as the goddess who taught Óðinn *seiðr*, know the spells required to raise the dead, the dead that are awakened in the Eddic sources and *Hervarar saga* are people who even in the context of indigenous beliefs would have been regarded as capable of returning posthumously by themselves, propelled and reanimated by their strong will, magic capabilities, or unfinished business and greed. *Völva*, Gróa the mother, and the giantess are all ascribed magic skills.¹¹² Angantýr was presumably also associated by medieval Icelanders with similar skills, since he is portrayed as a berserker, a warrior capable of expressing so-called berserk rage, and sometimes associated with magic.¹¹³ Not to mention the possibility that Angantýr may also be greedy, as he is not at first willing to give up his sword, greed being one of the characteristics often ascribed to revenants.¹¹⁴

109 *Grógaldur*, 338–342.

110 Búi þér allir, / [...] heilir í haugi. *Hervarar saga*, 19. Trans. Christopher Tolkien. Compare, however, Geary, *Living with the Dead*, 66.

111 On communication between sons and dead mothers in Old Norse-Icelandic myths and legends, see also John McKinnell, *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 197–217.

112 In archaeology, many apotropaic measures in connection with witches' graves have been reported. See e.g. Price, *The Viking Way*, 175–180; Leszek Gardela, “The Good, the Bad and the Undead. New Thoughts on the Ambivalence of Old Norse Sorcery,” in *Á austrvega. Saga and East Scandinavia. Preprint Papers of the 14th International Saga Conference Uppsala, 9th–15th August 2009*, 1, ed. Agneta Ney, H. Williams, and F.C. Ljungqvist (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), 285–294.

113 Berserkers were often thought to be invulnerable to weapons. The nature of berserkers, and even whether they actually existed in the Viking Era, is very controversial, however. On berserkers, see Benjamin Blaney, “Berserkr,” *Medieval Scandinavia*, 37–38; Philip Line, *The Vikings and Their Enemies. Warfare in Northern Europe 750–1100* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014), 199–205; Jens Peter Schjødt, “The Warrior in Old Norse Religion,” in *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages. Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*, ed. Gro Steinsland, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Jan Erik Rekdal & Ian Beuermann (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2011), 269–295 and the literature mentioned in it. On berserkers as restless dead, see Kanerva, “Having no Power to Return?” 71–73.

114 See Ármann Jakobsson, “The Specter of Old Age: Nasty Old Men in the Sagas of Icelanders,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 104 (2005): 297–325.

In life, *völva*, Gróa, the giantess, and Angantýr had been people (or supernatural beings) who could have an impact on things, strong-willed and able. In the medieval Icelandic context, they would have been considered part of the *hvatr* group of people: those who were “powerful, vigorous and bold” and not *blauðr*, that is “soft, weak and powerless.” The category of *blauðr* included “most women, children, slaves, and old, disabled, or otherwise disenfranchised men,” whereas men, especially aristocratic men, and some exceptional women were regarded as members of the *hvatr* group.¹¹⁵ Their specific nature makes them equal to the living who summoned them to this world, and explains why they are capable of harming their awakeners instead of obeying them blindly and being controlled by them. They were not subordinate objects of magic, but active agents who sometimes returned reluctantly. They held a grudge against their awakener, since returning was not desired by them, and were eager to get even. Since Eddic poetry does contain traces of beliefs of the pre-Christian era, the sources also support the notion that strong-willed, powerful posthumously active dead were part of the native tradition.

Concerning the dead warriors raised by magic discussed in the previous chapters, they too appear to be former powerful men. *Hrólfs saga kraka* shows that the warriors whose dead bodies are reanimated are of high status – aristocratic men and thus part of the *hvatr* group. Hence Böðvarr says of the troops of King Hrólfir *kraki*: “Assembled here against us are many men, rich and powerful.”¹¹⁶ This notion may well reflect the old, indigenous view of the dead as capable of returning only if they were strong-willed and powerful – *hvatr* – enough to accomplish this by themselves, a notion that survived in the long-term cultural layers of the tales. Still, the dead have lost some of their agency when they are raised by magic. They are no longer as powerful as they once were.

To return to the example discussed at the beginning of this article, the case of the seal-headed woman Selkolla and the unclean spirit as her reanimator, the loss of power can be put in another way: the weak and the powerless also became capable of posthumous restlessness. Unlike the restless dead who had been part of the *hvatr* group in life, Selkolla is originally an unbaptized child. What is important may not be so much the state of her soul because she did not receive Holy Baptism before death, but the fact that the corpse of a helpless infant is reanimated. It seems likely that such a baby was not construed as part of the “vigorous, bold and powerful” *hvatr* group, and consequently the child’s corpse would not have been expected to possess the power required to return among the living.¹¹⁷ What links both Selkolla and the dead raised by magic is their powerlessness; the power to decide whose corpse was reanimated was no longer that of the dead themselves, but in the hands of the Devil or devilish actors.

115 Carol Clover, “Regardless of Sex. Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe.” *Speculum* 68 (1993): 363–387, here 380 and *passim*.

116 Hier er nu margt manna saman komid áá móti oss ríjkra og týinna. *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 122.

117 See also Kanerva, “Having no Power to Return.”

Concluding remarks

The medieval Icelandic sources that have been discussed here suggest that the representation of the dead and their power to exert their influence on the living or become posthumously restless started to change during the medieval period. As would be expected, foreign literature and ideas had an effect on the peripheral northern culture and became absorbed into medieval Icelandic thought. In the light of the sources, the dead, who had possessed power and authority in pre-Christian Scandinavian tradition, continued to do so. But in addition to this indigenous view there also started to appear in literature a motif of living dead who were considered objects, controlled by and subordinate to the power that had reanimated them.

The passivity of the dead is especially clearly portrayed in the figure of Glámr in *Grettis saga*, whose writer appears to have followed the Christian doctrine as presented in *Elucidarius*. Glámr is portrayed as a combination of indigenous and foreign views in that he is strong-willed like the restless dead of the native tradition, but he is a shepherd and thus, like Selkolla, a person of low status. It is implied that his dead body is possessed by an unclean spirit that makes his corpse a passive container that only moves and acts because the transcendental agent reanimates it.

Sörla þáttur and *Hrólfs saga kraka*, however, appear to contain echoes of European literature and Latin necromancy, embellished with clerical views of pagan magic as a devilish practice. Warriors of high status, who may have been ascribed the capability of returning in the native tradition as well, were raised by people and pagan gods and goddesses who possessed magic skills. After reanimation these warriors were not construed as active agents any more, but as objects that were controlled by their awakener.

The northerners had had a tradition of deliberate communication with the dead even before people who were skilled in magic started to work their spells on the corpses in literature. According to ideas expressed in Eddic sources and *fornaldarsögur*, that communication with the dead was reciprocal, however. As a consequence, those deceased who would have been expected to possess the power to return of their own will because they were strong-willed people of high status or possessed magic skills themselves, without the help of any spells of the living, could also be a threat to the living. They were not subordinate and passive, and could not always be controlled either. Instead, the one who had come to wake the dead could expect some harm to follow from the reciprocal communication unless the deceased felt positively about the intruder: if he or she was, for instance, the descendant of the dead person. Others could prepare themselves for the malevolence of the dead, who did not return willingly if they were summoned by the living, and who, if they only had the chance, laid curses on them.

As discourses that are available in a certain culture and a certain time, reflect, change, and are changed by the reality of their time, we may expect the literature to convey to us information of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century conceptions. The sources suggest that the equality between the dead and the living slowly started to fade. The dead became "less active"; having originally been considered active agents

that had a will and power of their own, as foreign ideas became more internalized and intertwined with indigenous ones, the dead changed as another mode of thought emerged. The restless dead were increasingly interpreted as objects that had no power of their own, but were awakened by use of magic or made active by unclean spirits that invaded their lifeless bodies. In literature this is especially noticeable in sources that can be associated with the clerical elite. In them the dead became subordinate objects, “brainless zombies.”

Further study is still required on the role of the dead in literature and how it was affected by the cultural change that has been described above. As I have argued elsewhere, in native tradition the dead could return as a consequence of norm transgressions; they acted as moral judges and participated in the preservation and restoration of social equilibrium.¹¹⁸ It is possible that this role of the dead changed as the authority of the dead diminished. Moreover, I have not discussed here the dead saints and saint-like people who, for instance, appear to return posthumously as if of their own free will in Old Icelandic hagiographical literature and later folklore, an issue that deserves to be studied in future as well.

118 Kanerva, “The Role of the Dead”. For this common function of the dead in many cultures, see Ülo Valk, “Ghostly Possession and Real Estate: The Dead in Contemporary Estonian Folklore,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 43.1 (2006): 31–51, here 33.

3

ANIMATED CORPSES AND BODIES WITH POWER IN THE SCHOLASTIC AGE

Winston Black

Neither fully dead nor fully alive, zombies have long exercised a horrified fascination in readers and observers, whether in medieval collections of *mirabilia*, Early Modern pamphlets, or modern media such as the immensely popular *Resident Evil* video games, books, and films, or *The Walking Dead* comic books and television series.¹ But zombies, which first appeared in the Western record a millennium ago, are not found equally distributed over time, for they appear in greatest numbers during periods of significant cultural upheaval. Practitioners of the new, scholarly field of “zombie studies,” which has recently developed in reaction to the ubiquity of the undead in popular culture, explore the cultural and historical contexts for zombies and share the central thesis that stories of the walking dead reflect deeply held, and sometimes unconscious, anxieties about threatening ideas and events in the author’s culture. This applies as much to fictional zombies of the modern era, who can reflect fears about threats like disease, nuclear warfare, or racial miscegenation,² as to periods of apparently genuine belief in the living dead such as

- 1 Versions of this essay were presented as the keynote address for “The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse,” The 4th Annual Interdisciplinary Symposium of the Anthropology Graduate Student Association, SUNY-Buffalo (March 2014), and in the session “Hell Studies” at the 50th International Congress of Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan (May 2015). I thank the organizers of these conferences for inviting me to speak and the audience and fellow panelists in those sessions for their helpful comments and questions. I am also grateful to Joëlle Rollo-Koster for her advice, and to my wife, Dr. Emily Reiner, for her close reading of several drafts of this essay.
- 2 See the volume *Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, ed. Niall Scott (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), especially the essays by Kevin Alexander Boon, “Ontological Anxiety Made Flesh: The Zombie in Literature, Film and Culture,” 33–43, and Peter Dendle, “The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety,” 45–57. For a recent overview of the field see Todd K. Platts, “Locating Zombies in the Sociology of Popular Culture,” *Sociology Compass* 7 (2013): 547–60. On

during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in central Europe, suffering the deadly fallout of the Protestant Reformation,³ or the High Middle Ages, an era which saw dramatic and contentious developments in European thought and religion.

It is medieval zombies, or “revenants” as they are known in the scholarly literature, that concern me here, for a troubling aspect of this period in the history of the undead is its relative brevity. One might easily imagine, based on depictions of the medieval undead in popular culture and news outlets, that the benighted Middle Ages were crawling with zombies.⁴ But the reality is that most medieval reports of revenants are clustered in a period of about a century (roughly 1130–1230), with only a scattering of tales in the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, a period coinciding with the beginning of the “scholastic age” in Western Europe. Even in this century of more prolific revenant stories, the corporeal undead are still a rare phenomenon: only a few dozen reports of explicitly corporeal revenants survive from the scholastic era, and only in northern Europe (England, Iceland, and German lands of the Empire). By contrast, incorporeal ghosts appear by the thousands in sermons, *exempla*, and moralizing tales, as early as the time of Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604) and consistently between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries.⁵ The distinction between incorporeal and corporeal was important for medieval authors, for it indicated profound metaphysical and theological differences. Ghosts were frequently explained as apparitions in dreams or divine revelations – real projections of a soul in need, but not actually there. The revenant, by definition, is corporeal and physically present.

There have been numerous studies of medieval revenants, many of them of high quality, but none have directly addressed the problem of why the majority of medieval revenants appear for a relatively brief period and in a circumscribed area. To answer that question, I will take my cue here from contemporary zombie studies and identify those anxieties active during the scholastic age, particularly in the

the topic of zombies and migrants, Jon Stratton, “Zombie trouble: Zombie texts, bare life and displaced people,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14:3 (2011): 265–81.

- 3 On the revival of stories about the living dead during the Protestant and Catholic Reformations, see Bruce Gordon, “Malevolent Ghosts and Ministering Angels: Apparitions and Pastoral Care in the Swiss Reformation,” in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge, 2000), 87–109, and Darren Oldridge, *Strange Histories. The trial of the pig, the walking dead, and other matters of fact from the medieval and Renaissance worlds* (Routledge, 2007), 67–72.
- 4 Take, for example “Medieval Skeletons Reveal Fear of the Undead,” an online article posted Sept 12, 2011, at the Archaeology News Network, <http://archaeologynewsnet.work.blogspot.com/2011/09/medieval-skeletons-reveal-fear-of.html#.VdXAPK1Viko> (accessed June 6, 2016), or the cover of the paperback edition of Oldridge, *Strange Histories*, showing a modern, unattributed painting of a horrific, sightless revenant rising from the grave, next to impaled and dismembered corpses, horned demonic creatures, and a cloaked, monkish figure in a state of literally illuminated ecstasy. This cover does a disservice to Oldridge’s usually insightful scholarship.
- 5 Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Ch. 3, “The Invasion of Ghosts,” 59–78.

cultural ambit of the schools of Paris, which inspired several generations of clerical authors to record revenant stories and then, seemingly as a group, to abandon them. The rise and subsequent disappearance of medieval revenants are indicative of anxieties held by scholastic authors about bodies: the relationship between body and soul, the source of the body's natural powers, and the cause of movement in bodies living or dead. These anxieties developed in a period of rapidly shifting ideas about theology, natural philosophy, and medicine, and was a product of new patterns in higher education developed in the long twelfth century. Students now pursued not only grammar and Christian doctrine, like learned clerics of the earlier Middle Ages, but were frequently trained in the exercise of logic, the mathematical sciences of the *quadrivium*, and natural philosophy. The twelfth century saw the meeting, sometimes contentious and sometimes cooperative, of a new science and a new theology, both of which had obvious implications for understanding bodies and souls. This meeting occurred primarily in the context of the vibrant cathedral schools of the twelfth century and new universities of the thirteenth, where the same scholars both embraced Aristotelian physics and Hippocratic-Galenic medicine and developed a new structure for the Christian afterlife around a formal doctrine of Purgatory (developing throughout the twelfth century but promulgated by Rome only in 1274).⁶

This anxiety about bodies, coupled with a powerful curiosity typical of scholastic authors, is particularly evident in the varieties of animated corpse or empowered body parts that appear during this era alongside revenants in the writings of Latin clerics. These include the corpses of murder victims that bleed in the presence of their attackers (a phenomenon later called "cruentation"), medicinal *mumia* made from Egyptian mummies, dissected cadavers that could help investigators unlock the secrets of nature or the details of a crime, and philosophical arguments for a separate "corporeal form" (*forma corporeitatis*) residing in the body itself and separate from the purely spiritual soul.⁷ Every one of these corpses, from the most active revenant to the inactive cadaver, represents an answer to the question, "What can a

6 The development of each of these topics (natural philosophy, scholastic medicine, Purgatory) in the first scholastic era of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is a monumental field of study. For essential introductions, I point the reader to Edward Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy: From the Ancient World to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 130–65; Danielle Jacquart, "Medical Scholasticism," in *Western Medical Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, ed. Mirko Grmek and Bernardino Fantini, trans. Anthony Shugaar (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 197–240; and Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984), with valuable correctives by Brian Patrick McGuire, "Purgatory, the community of saints, and medieval change," *Viator* 20 (1989): 61–84, and Isabel Moreira, *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

7 As should be clear, I am defining "animated corpse" broadly to mean any instance when a medieval observer believed there was some virtue or life remaining in a human corpse or body part, inhering of its own natural power and not by divine intervention or miracle. This focus on natural powers allows us to exclude the most obvious example of animated corpses in the Middle Ages, that is, the relics of saints. Holy relics represent a

human body do after death?” And while there was a significant chronological overlap between these modes of animation during the scholastic age, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the clerical elite gradually abandoned belief in revenants for other animated corpses which were more readily explained by Aristotelian natural philosophy and less offensive to the new theology of Purgatory.

The temporal coincidence of these forms of corpse animation is striking: at roughly the same time as the peak of revenant stories in the later twelfth century, we also find *mumia* redefined in Latin pharmaceutical manuals as a spice infused with the blood of corpses, and we find the first reports of cruentation and attempts to explain it in terms of both natural philosophy and theology, and we also find a revival of interest in human anatomy and the first recorded human autopsies and dissections in the Middle Ages. That so many new and different approaches to corpses and their potential animation appear at the same time among Latin authors is no mere coincidence. The scholastic theology, natural philosophy, and medicine developing during the twelfth century all encouraged their students to ask difficult questions about bodies. In response those students, mostly clerics, redefined corpses and caused bodies and souls to move farther apart *post mortem*: every dead body became truly and wholly dead, and the soul went automatically to Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory. Revenants that were animated by human souls became unpalatable to mainstream theologians and their students, who increasingly explained them away by demonic intervention, while natural philosophers and physicians explored a range of alternatives that allowed human bodies to retain some degree of life force, animating spirit, or power that could in some way help, hurt, heal, or otherwise affect the living.

To justify these admittedly bold and sweeping statements about intellectual and religious developments in the scholastic age, I will place revenants in the wider context of debates about corpses, including their uses, their potential ability to move or speak, and their religious or biological status between death and the General Resurrection of all the dead at the end of time. In this respect, I am consciously inverting the approach taken by Katharine Park in her essay “The life of the corpse” (1995), where she compares the northern European belief in the briefly persisting vitality of corpses with a specifically Italian belief in the complete lifelessness of corpses, which encouraged the revival of human dissection.⁸ I begin by reviewing the historiography on revenants, and then examine the first appearances and contexts of the “passive” forms of corpse animation outlined above. As each of these topics (*mumia*, cruentation, dissection) has been studied in great depth by other authors, my goal here is to present how scholastic authors only in this most prolific period of revenant stories, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, described and explained each instance of a corpse moving, acting, or somehow “speaking.” I will then explore some of the new elements in scholastic theology, especially those concerning the ontological

suspension of the natural order, for they are animated by God’s grace as a sign of his love for that special person, and therefore they will be left aside in my discussion of corpse animation.

8 Katharine Park, “The Life of the Corpse: Division and dissection in late medieval Europe,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 50 (1995): 111–32.

status of corpses in light of debates about Christian Aristotelianism, with the goal of outlining some of the reasons why clerical authors were so interested in revenants during the “long twelfth century,” only to abandon them almost entirely in favor of a range of more innocuous and less theologically troubling types of living dead.

Explaining medieval revenants

While stories of the walking dead in the Middle Ages have long been known to historians of religion and popular culture, it is only in the last few decades that scholars have systematically distinguished incorporeal ghosts from corporeal revenants, and likewise distinguished medieval revenants from modern zombies, which are based more on African and Haitian traditions than on premodern Western models. While the latter zombies are typically mindless and terrifyingly destructive automata of flesh, stripped of any original personality, medieval revenants are rather embodied ghosts, reanimated by their own souls. While revenants typically share with zombies the appearance of a rotting corpse, they are not necessarily evil or destructive. Revenants are intelligent imitators of the living: they speak, have emotions, make requests, deliver messages, and even sing. Medieval revenants must also be distinguished, of course, from the resurrected dead: the latter were dead and now are alive, while the former are paradoxically both dead and alive, or neither dead nor alive.

Leading the way in understanding medieval revenants were specialists in Norse and Icelandic literature who, starting in the 1980s, charted the appearance and cultural meanings of *draugar* (singular *draug* or *draugr*), violent corpses reanimated by their original spirits.⁹ The undead in continental and British sources have received due attention in Paul Barber’s *Vampires, Burial and Death* (1988), Jean-Claude Schmitt’s monograph *Les revenants* (1994), and in Nancy Caciola’s seminal article “Wraiths, revenants, and ritual in medieval culture” (1996).¹⁰ While Schmitt examines primarily

9 Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, “The Restless Dead: An Icelandic Ghost Story,” in *The Folklore of Ghosts*, ed. H. R. Ellis Davidson and W. M. S. Russell (Cambridge: Published for the Folklore Society by D. S. Brewer, 1981), 155–75; Claude Lecouteux, *Fantômes et revenants au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Éditions Image, 1986), translated as *The Return of the Dead. Ghosts, Ancestors, and the Transparent Veil of the Pagan Mind*, trans. Jon E. Graham (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2009). Despite his title, Lecouteux focuses mostly on Icelandic revenants. Also of interest are William Sayers, “The Alien and Alienated as Unquiet Dead in the Sagas of the Icelanders,” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 242–63, and Gregg A. Smith, *The Function of the Living Dead in Medieval Norse and Celtic Literature: Death and Desire* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007).

10 Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death: Folklore and Reality* (London, 1988); Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Les revenants: les vivants et les morts dans la société médiévale* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994); Caciola, “Wraiths, Revenants, and Ritual in Medieval Culture.” I did not have a chance to review Caciola’s *Afterlives: Paganism, Christianity, and the Return of the Dead in Medieval Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016) before the publication of this essay. Many medieval tales of revenants are usefully collected and translated by Andrew Joynes in *Medieval Ghost Stories: An Anthology of Miracles, Marvels and Prodigies* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001).

incorporeal ghosts (*revenant*, “returner,” can mean ghost or zombie in French), Caciola explores the shifting descriptions of and explanations for corporeal revenants. Most scholarship on revenants since then is dependent on these works.¹¹

William of Newburgh, an Augustinian canon in Yorkshire, was one of the most prolific reporters of revenant stories. In his *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* (finished by 1198), William relates in detail four different stories about dead men who rose from their graves and terrorized neighboring communities in northern England.¹² All of William’s revenants are malevolent, causing damage, spreading fear, and being chased by packs of angry dogs. William reports all of these stories as true, *prodigiosa* (unnatural and ominous), contemporary, and without explanation:

That the corpses of the dead, moved by some kind of spirit, leave their graves and wander around as the cause of danger and terror to the living before going back to tombs which open up to receive them, is not something which would be easily believed, were it not for the fact that there have been clear examples in our own time, with abundant accounts of such events. Nothing of the sort is reported in books of former times, which those of us who are inclined to study might meditate upon, and surely, since these ancient books recorded the everyday and matter-of-fact events of former times, they would not have been able to suppress accounts of stupefying and horrible events if indeed they had occurred.¹³

It is not clear what “books of former times” William was reading for evidence of revenants, but if he had looked around his own Anglo-Norman culture he would have found them in abundance.

The evidence falls into two main categories: first are reports by learned clerics and monks, mostly English and German who wrote in the century *ca.*1130–*ca.*1230. They include (in roughly chronological order) William of Malmesbury, Abbot Geoffrey of Burton, Walter Map, William of Newburgh, Gervase of Tilbury, and Caesarius of Heisterbach, all of whom claim to believe their tales of revenants and are often at a loss to explain them. Contemporary with Gervase and Caesarius are the Old French romances *Amadas et Idoine* and *Perlesvaus* (both written in the first

11 For example, see Jacqueline Simpson, “Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse? Debatable Apparitions in Medieval England,” *Folklore* 114:3 (2003): 389–402; C. S. Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); R. N. Swanson, “Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages,” in *The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul*, ed. Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon. *Studies in Church History* 45 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), 143–73; and John Blair, “The Dangerous Dead in Early Medieval England,” in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. Stephen Baxter, Catherine E. Karkov, Janet L. Nelson, and David Pelteret, *Studies in Early Medieval Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 539–59. Darren Oldridge provides a useful discussion of walking dead in the later medieval and Early Modern periods in *Strange Histories*, 56–75.

12 William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* V.22–24, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, ed. Richard Howlett. 2 vols. (London: Rolls Series, 1885), 2: 474–82, partially translated by Joynes, *Medieval Ghost Stories*, 97–102.

13 Quoted by Joynes, *Medieval Ghost Stories*, 99.

quarter of the thirteenth century), which feature haunted cemeteries and the apparently corporeal bodies of dead knights which rise upon the approach of the hero.¹⁴ Second are the Icelandic *Grettis Saga*, *Eyrbyggja Saga*, *Laxdæla Saga*, and *Njals Saga* among others, describing events around the year 1000, but written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. (As I will focus here on the Latin, scholastic descriptions of revenants and corpse animation, I will leave aside the sagas, with the full understanding that *draugar* are an important example of the medieval undead.) A few chronological, but not geographic, outliers only reinforce the profusion of revenants in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: revenants or moving corpses are found in the early eleventh-century *Chronicon* of Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg;¹⁵ in eleventh-century England we find the corpse of Cwoenthryth, sister of St Kenelm of Winchcombe, refusing to stay in its grave, and the corpse of a Suffolk sheriff who offended St Edmund possessed and animated by a demon;¹⁶ and in a set of supernatural tales copied in the later fourteenth century by an anonymous Cistercian monk of Byland Abbey in Yorkshire.¹⁷

The rarity of revenants and their limited geography and chronology has not gone unnoticed, and some scholars have sought the reasons why only certain groups at certain times accept the idea of an embodied ghost. They have therefore focused on contextualizing medieval revenants: Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt have explained the profusion of ghost stories (including revenants) in the later Middle Ages as a product of clergy seeking ways to educate Christians about the formal doctrine of Purgatory and convince them of the efficacy of suffrages for the dead;¹⁸ several scholars have suggested that the English predilection for revenant tales came from Norse and Danish invaders and settlers bringing tales of *draugar* with them;¹⁹ Nancy Caciola identifies in Thietmar of Merseburg's stories of revenants an intentional syncretism of Slavic pagan and medieval Christian cultures to aid in conversion to Christianity; C. S. Watkins places the revenant stories of William of Newburgh, Walter Map, and others in a primarily Anglo-Latin tradition of supernatural tales; and Katharine Park distinguishes southern and northern Europeans by their differing attitudes toward the potential life of corpses.²⁰

14 Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 80–81.

15 Nancy Caciola examines the revenants of Thietmar in "Revenants, Resurrection, and Burnt Sacrifice," *Preternature* 3:2 (2014): 311–38.

16 Blair, "The Dangerous Dead in Early Medieval England," 540, 550.

17 M. R. James edited the monk of Byland's stories in "Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories," *English Historical Review* 37 (1922): 413–22, some of which are translated by Joynes, *Medieval Ghost Stories*, 120–25.

18 Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 79–82, 177–81; Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 4–5, 178–81.

19 The English debt to tales of *draugar* is suggested by Davidson, "The Restless Dead," 169–72; Lecouteux, *The Return of the Dead*, 108–16; and Caciola, "Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual," 15–17. C. S. Watkins, however, makes the important observation that revenants are never reported as pagan beliefs, but are rather placed firmly within the Christian tradition: *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England*, 86.

20 Caciola, "Revenants, Resurrection, and Burnt Sacrifice"; Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England*; Park, "The Life of the Corpse".

What unites most of these scholars is a tendency to explain revenants according to what sort of spiritual power animates them.²¹ The now standard interpretation, best seen in Caciola's and Watkin's work, divides revenants into a binary of divine or demonic power. Their best evidence comes from William of Newburgh who, out of his four revenant stories, describes only one as animated by the man's soul, with God's permission, another one as animated by the Devil's power, and on the other two he is unclear. William, writing in the 1190s, serves as a valuable transitional figure between revenants of the twelfth century, who are usually the actual people who lived in those bodies, reanimated by their original souls, and the second generation of revenants, after about 1200, which apparently fell under the pressures of contemporary theology, made increasingly international and homogeneous through the influence of Paris and its new university. According to this theology, it became unacceptable for clerical authors to attribute a revenant's power to an unaided human soul. Some clergy responded by "demonising the restless dead," to use Carl Watkin's felicitous phrase: in later stories the revenant is not the original person anymore, but an empty shell for demonic possession.²² For example, the thirteenth-century moralist Caesarius of Heisterbach told of a moneylender in Pechen who died, and afterwards "a devil moved her arms and legs as though she were counting money." This movement stopped after a priest doused her body in holy water and performed an exorcism. Likewise, a knight named Everard was raised from his tomb by demons, and his horrified friend had to capture him, tie him up, and bury him again to prevent his return.²³ But not long into the thirteenth century, even the demonized revenants disappear, and the later medieval undead population came to be composed almost entirely of incorporeal ghosts. By the 1230s, William of Auvergne, bishop of Paris, could ridicule anyone believing that dead men could come back to life. And William was hardly a modern skeptic, for he did believe in ghosts, witches, demons, and all manner of incorporeal spirits.²⁴

While this standard explanation of changes in medieval revenants is convincing, insofar as we can argue from the scant evidence, it oversimplifies a complex subject by defining revenants only by their spiritual animating force, divine or demonic,

21 The primary exceptions are those scholars who offer physical or medical explanations for stories about the undead. These include Paul Barber who, in *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, attributes many stories of the bloated and bloody appearance of revenants and vampires to normal processes of decomposition, improperly understood at the time, and Stephen Gordon, who attributes certain stories of demons and revenants (including those of William of Newburgh) to traumatic episodes of nightmares and sleep paralysis in "Medical Condition, Demon or Undead Corpse? Sleep Paralysis and the Nightmare in Medieval Europe," *Social History of Medicine* 28:3 (2015): 425–44.

22 Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England*, 182.

23 These stories are related by Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England*, 183.

24 Caciola, "Wraiths, Revenants, and Ritual," 17; Michael D. Bailey, *Fearful Spirits, Reasoned Follies: The Boundaries of Superstition in Late Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 60–65.

and not taking into account the nature of the body itself. Moreover, the transfer of causation from souls to demons does not explain why stories of any revenants, even the demonic, disappear so suddenly in the thirteenth century. We can begin to answer that question by examining other modes of corpse animation, which were described at the same time and in similar scholastic circles as the bulk of the revenant stories, and which would eventually replace those revenants as the only acceptable types of living dead among the learned clergy.

Mummies and *mumia*

Roughly contemporary with the peak of revenant stories in the twelfth century is the appearance in European pharmacological texts of medicines derived from human corpses.²⁵ Medicines made from the dead are not the same as the living dead, of course, but they share in the tendency, most pronounced in the scholastic age, to identify and explore any sort of remnant vitality in corpses. In particular, the change in definition among twelfth-century European pharmaceutical authors of the medicine known as *mumia* – from a spice found near corpses to a spice derived from corpses – is symptomatic of a wider desire to find bodies with power to replace revenants, which were increasingly unacceptable in current theology. *Mumia*, or “mummy,” is a sticky resin derived from the head or spine of Egyptian mummies, according to medieval pharmaceutical manuals. Like much of the new medicine in the long twelfth century, Europeans learned of *mumia* from Arabic sources, but the manner in which Latin authors modified their sources is consistent with changing attitudes toward the vitality of corpses. In Persian and Arabic *mumiya* means simply “wax” and by the tenth century Arabic medical authors use the term for naturally occurring bitumen or asphalt, which were useful in plasters and antidotes. That remained the Arabic definition for the rest of the Middle Ages. But because this sticky, black form of petroleum looked a lot like the substance found around the necks of mummified Egyptians, or because the blackened skin of many mummies looked like it has been prepared with bitumen, an author in the Arabic or Latin world confused the two substances. In reality, the secretions from Egyptian mummies was probably a mix of gums, blood, spinal fluid, aloe, and myrrh, and the dark color of the mummies is due to their great age and the coloring of other preservatives, but not bitumen.

European scholars, translating Arabic medical texts in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, all describe *mumia* as a sticky substance found near or on mummified bodies, particularly around the neck. In the later eleventh century, the famed medical translator Constantinus Africanus compiled a book on the degrees (intensity) of medicinal ingredients, called the *Liber graduum* or *De gradibus simplicium*,

25 Karl H. Dannenfeldt, “Egyptian Mumia: The Sixteenth Century Experience and Debate,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16:2 (1985): 163–80; Michael Camille, “The Corpse in the Garden: *Mumia* in Medieval Herbal Illustrations,” in *Micrologus* 7. *Il cadavere. The Corpse* (Florence: SISMELE, 1999): 297–318. Richard Sugg traces the history of *mumia* into the Early Modern and Modern eras in *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires. The History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

which twelfth-century editors inserted in the *Practica* section of his monumental medical encyclopedia called the *Pantegni*.²⁶ Constantinus is aware of the elusive definition of *mumia*, and stresses that it is a substance applied to the dead and thereby changed by them: “Some say that *mumia* is asphalt, yet it is a certain spice found in the tombs of the dead. For the ancients anointed the dead with it so they would not putrefy or produce worms. It is hot and dry in the third degree.”²⁷ In Constantinus’ opinion *mumia* is not produced by the corpses themselves, but is a substance used in their preservation. Matthaeus Platearius, an Italian medical scholar writing his popular antidotary *Circa instans* in the mid-twelfth century, elaborates on Constantine’s report: “Mumia is hot and dry in the fourth [*sic*] degree, according to Constantine.... Mumia is a spice which is found in the tombs of the dead. In antiquity it was customary for corpses to be prepared with balsam and myrrh around the head and neck, and this still happens among the pagans around Babylon [*i.e.* Cairo], where there is a great deal of balsam. Therefore the blood [of the body] is drawn up to the head by the heat of the balsam where it is cooked, heated, dried, and transformed into mumia. Mumia is likewise found around the spine. You should select that which is shiny, black, ill-smelling, and also heavy.”²⁸ For Platearius, *mumia* is now a product of the corpse. It is still composed mostly of preservative spices, but it is mixed and transformed by the blood.²⁹

In the following decades the connection between *mumia* and the corpse itself grew stronger, as European scholars shifted the meaning of *mumia* from a spice found near or on corpses to a spice produced by corpses. The first to do so was Gerard of Cremona, translator of the medical works of Rhazes (al-Razi) in the

26 On the circulation of the *Liber graduum* see Faith Wallis, “The Ghost in the *Articella*: A Twelfth-century Commentary on the Constantinian *Liber Graduum*,” and Winston Black “I will add what the Arab once taught”: Constantine the African in Northern European Medical Verse,” both in *Herbs and Healers from the Ancient Mediterranean through the Medieval West. Essays in Honor of John M. Riddle*, ed. Anne Van Arsdaal and Timothy Graham (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 107–51 and 153–85.

27 Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. “Mumia quidam dicunt esse asfaltum: quedam tamen species est que inuenitur in sepulcris mortuorum. Antiqui enim mortuos ex ea ungebant ne cito putrefierent: aut vermes producerent: calida et sicca est in tertio gradu.” Constantinus Africanus, *Pantegni*, *Practica*, lib. II, “De mumia”, printed in *Opera omnia Ysaac...* 2 vols. (Lyons, 1515), vol. 2, fol. 84r.

28 “Mumia calida est et sicca in quarto gradu teste Constantino.... Est autem mumia quedam species, que in sepulcris mortuorum reperitur. Solebant antiquitus corpora mortuorum balsamo, vel mirra condiri, et adhuc fit apud paganos circa Babiloniam, ubi est copia multa balsami, circa cerebrum et spinam. Vnde sanguis ad cerebrum calore balsami trahitur, et excoquitur, aduritur et desiccatur et in mumiam transmittatur, et circa spinam etiam mumia inuenitur. Eligenda est que lucida est nigra et fetida, que etiam est solida.” Matthaeus Platearius, *Circa instans*, printed as *De simplici medicina*, in *Practica Jo[annis] Serapionis dicta breuiarium* (Venice: Octavianus Scottus, 1497), fol. 202v. This passage was copied, with few changes, in the thirteenth-century *Tractatus de herbis* by Ps. Bartholomaeus Mini de Senis, *Tractatus de herbis* (Ms London, British Library, Egerton 747), ed. Iolanda Ventura (Florence: SISMEL, 2009), 561–62.

29 Karl Dannenfeldt confuses the texts and dates of these early authors on *mumia*, making Constantinus and Platearius somehow dependent on the later Gerard of Cremona, and Michael Camille and Richard Sugg inherit this confusion.

1170s, who says in the *Synonymia Rasis*, a brief alphabetical glossary of ingredients in Rhazes' works, "Mumia is a substance found in the lands where dead bodies are prepared with aloe, by which the liquid of the corpse is mixed with the aloe and becomes similar to marine pitch."³⁰ In Gerard's translation of Rhazes' most famous work, *Liber ad almansorem*, *mumia* is prescribed for various discharges, such as bloody nose, spitting blood, dysentery, or menstrual problems, apparently applying the logic of *similia similibus*, like treating like: the mummy's discharge helps your discharge.³¹ Variations on Rhazes' statements, by way of Gerard of Cremona, were made for the next several centuries, with an increasing emphasis on the transfer of virtue from the human body to a pitch-like substance. According to Karl Dannenfeldt, "These references indicate that initially the mumia of the tombs was considered to be the resinous, aromatic exudate which came from the bodies of the ancient Egyptians and which received a special virtue because it contained fluids of the body."³² This special virtue is not a soul, of course, but learned European physicians and natural philosophers were eager to locate a certain life-giving property to medicines derived from corpses.³³ Nor was this a short-lived phenomenon: *mumia* featured in most pharmaceutical manuals of later medieval and early modern Europe, and was used in medicines and paints even into the Victorian era.

Was the transition of *mumia* from bitumen to a mixture of spices, pitch, and bodily fluids of a corpse a mere accident of translation? This is unlikely. In none of the Arabic works is *mumia* given any definition beyond a variety of bitumen, while even in the most literal translations of Arabic texts, Latin Europeans modified or added to the passages on *mumia* to stress its origin in human corpses and the healing properties present in this mixture of exotic spices with exotic bodies. *Mumia* first appeared in Europe simply as part of the sweeping translation movement of the long twelfth century, which began with medical works in southern Italy. Its redefinition and widespread popularity by the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries are symptomatic of a desire of learned Christians to identify other forms of corpse animation that were less frightening, more useful, and more acceptable to current philosophy and theology than were revenants.

Cruentation

A similar case of corpse animation, contemporary with the redefinition of *mumia* and the peak of revenant stories, is the dead body that bleeds in the presence of its

30 "Mumia res est que inuenitur in terris ubi mortuorum corpora aloe condiuntur a quibus humor mortui cum aloe mixtis [*sic, recte mixtus*] resoluitur et similiatur pici marine." *Synonymia Rasis*, in *Contenta in hoc volumine Liber Rasis ad almansorem...* (n.p. 1497), 103v–106v: 106r. Translation is my own.

31 *Liber Rasis ad almansorem*, Tractatus Tertius, cap. 40 (n.p. 1497), fol. 16v.

32 Dannenfeldt, "Egyptian Mumia," 165.

33 Katharine Park goes too far in associating this desire to find a remnant vitality in corpses, as in the case of *mumia*, only with northern Europeans ("The Life of the Corpse", 116–117). The fact that all three of these early authors on *mumia* were Italians or writing in Italy contradicts her argument.

murderer. This represents a literal interpretation of God's words to Cain in Genesis 4:10 (KJ), "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." Early modern jurists named this telling action of a corpse, whether judged natural or miraculous, "cruentation" (*jus cruentationis cadaveri*), and *Baarrecht* ("bier-right") or *Bahrprobe* in German, and they wrote prolifically on its reality and relevance in a court of law.³⁴ It first appeared, however, in the later twelfth century and, like stories of revenants, is found only in northern Europe. A difficulty in understanding the meaning of cruentation in the High Middle Ages, and whether people actually believed in it, is that bleeding corpses are found as much in historical sources as in fictional literature, like the *Nibelungenlied*, *Iwein*, and Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*.³⁵ As we shall see, though, natural philosophers eagerly embraced the subject of cruentation and gave every impression that they fully believed in its existence.

Perhaps the earliest case occurred around 1180, when the Cisterican abbot of Trois-Fontaines, Gérard d'Igny, was brutally murdered by one of his monks, Simon, who hit his abbot with an axe while he was praying. Pierre le Borgne, the Cisterican abbot of Igny was visiting at the time, and according to his report of the murder, Gérard's corpse bled in the presence of Simon while all the monks were being interrogated. This was not considered definitive proof of Simon's guilt, but was taken as one of several "conjectural signs." Soon after, in 1189, King Henry II of England died while fighting his rebellious son Richard. All sources agree Henry died of natural causes, and not from murder or battle, but nonetheless, when Richard entered the chapel where his father lay, blood gushed from the dead king's nostrils. The flow of blood stopped the moment Richard left the room. Other English chroniclers in the following quarter century, including Roger of Hoveden, Benedict of Peterborough, Matthew Paris, and Gerald of Wales, record this story.³⁶ One final example: Thomas of Cantimpré, writing his *Bonum universale de apibus* in the 1260s records how in 1220, Henri, abbot of a monastery in Blois, was murdered by three assassins who had been hired by his own canons. The canons were upset with Henri's strict policies and attempts to reform the monastery. When Henri's body was laid out in the church and the traitors entered, blood exploded from his dry wounds. His blood was accusing someone in the room, but it wasn't clear whom. Henri had clearly feared the worst, since he had

34 The most thorough study on this topic is by Alain Boureau, "La preuve par le cadavre qui saigne au XIII^e siècle. Entre expérience commune et savoir scolastique," in *Il cadavere/The corpse. Micrologus VII* (1999): 247–81. Boureau improves and expands on Henri Platelle, "La voix du sang: le cadavre qui saigne en présence de son meurtrier," in *Actes du 99^e Congrès national des Sociétés savantes, Besançon, 1974, Section de philologie et d'histoire jusqu'à 1610, I, La Piété Populaire au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1977), 161–179, reprinted in Henri Platelle, *Présence de l'au-delà. Une vision médiévale du monde* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2004), 13–28. Platelle's essay is most valuable for his study of the later persistence and development of theories of cruentation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

35 Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), 41–46, 75–76.

36 Boureau, "La preuve par le cadavre," 250–52.

already requested protection from the pope himself. Four other examples, historical and literary, are recorded by Alain Boureau for the century between 1180 and 1280, which we need not review now.³⁷

Stories about cruentation were popular in northern Europe, especially in England, and it is there that the natural philosophers first sought rational explanations for these frightening marvels. Around 1200 an English scribe compiled 332 questions and answers, mostly about natural phenomena and drawn primarily from the writings of the Salernitan masters Urso and Maurus. These so-called “Salernitan Questions,” of which Brian Lawn has found and edited some eleven different collections, are a valuable source for understanding what phenomena natural philosophers were observing, and the assumptions they brought to their observation, categorization, and description of nature. The author of the first and largest collection (Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms Auct. F.3.10) discusses the process of cruentation in two different questions; he clearly felt it was an important and debatable topic of natural philosophy. This is hardly odd in this collection, since many of the questions concern the close observation of the behavior of corpses, such as: Why do dead women lie supine in the water? Why do dead men lie prone in the water? Why does a dead man not float except after his gall bladder has burst? Why do we fear the dead, and especially those whom we loved in life?³⁸

In one instance cruentation is treated with its own question, “Why does blood bubble out of the wound of a murdered man when the one who killed the man leans over him?” (*Queritur quare superveniente eo qui hominem occidit, sanguis ex vulnere occisi ebulliat?*)³⁹ The author calls his detailed response a *physica*, that is, an answer based on natural and physical causes. He stresses that this marvel occurs only in recently dead corpses, in which the blood and spirits are fresh enough to seek union through the medium of the air with the blood and spirits of the murder victim, which are apparently still on the person or weapon of the murderer standing near. This happens according to the standard principle of medieval natural philosophy that like seeks like: the dead man’s spirits, still active so long as the corpse and blood are fresh, seek their *similitudo* wherever possible. Earlier in this work, the same author mentions cruentation under the larger topic of the laws of attraction: “We likewise see blood flowing from the wound of a murder victim while his murderer passes near, [who] is able to pass by distantly enough that, because of this, in no way will [the blood] flow out.”⁴⁰ As this author explains, attraction between two substances (including a murderer and his victim’s blood) happens in various

37 Alain Boureau, “La preuve par le cadavre qui saigne au XIII^e siècle”.

38 *The Prose Salernitan Questions edited from a Bodleian Manuscript (Auct. F.3.10)*, ed. Brian Lawn. *Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi V* (London: British Academy, 1979), #B259 (*Queritur quare mortue mulieres iacent in aqua supine?*), B260 (*Queritur quare viri mortui proni inveniuntur in aqua?*), B261 (*Queritur quare mortuus homo non supermatet nisi rupto felle?*), B270 (*Queritur quare mortuos timeamus, maxime quos in vita dileximus?*), pp. 125–27, 131.

39 *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, ed. Lawn, #B269 (pp. 130–131).

40 “Similiter videmus fluentem sanguinem ex vulnere interfecti, interfectore prope trans-eunte, tam remote potest transire quod propter hoc nullo modo exibat.” *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, ed. Lawn, #B162 (p. 81).

ways and because of a variety of natural laws: by the “law of emptiness” (*lege vacuitatis*), the “law of lightness” (*lege levitatis*), the “law of similitude” (*lege similitudinis*). It is this last law, of similitude, that is at play in much of medieval medical theory and in cruentation.

The earliest author of Salernitan *quaestiones* did well to emphasize that his answer was *physica*, for all orthodox scholars recognized that they were causes and explanations outside of the strict limits of Aristotelian physics and Galenic medicine. For example, a roughly contemporary scribe added another 163 questions later in Auct. F.3.10, and also asked about cruentation. His response takes into consideration both natural philosophy and divine intervention: “*Why does the blood of a murder victim flow in the presence of the murderer?* Response. It is a divine judgment, so that [the murderer] can be moved to repent. Or, the murderer himself is moved in his own conscience, whereby his spiritual substances are moved, and having been moved they send forth a spirit and a smoke which moves the air. With the moved air acting as a medium, his breath is carried right up the victim’s body. And because the body is fresh, is grows warm, so that its humors are moved and from that an eruption of blood occurs.”⁴¹ This binary explanation for the cause of cruentation – natural or supernatural – continued throughout the thirteenth century, as is seen in Giles of Rome’s interpretation (recorded in the 1290s) of the bleeding corpse of Thomas of Cantilupe, bishop of Hereford, who died in 1282. Giles considers this episode of cruentation a miracle, since he rejects all cruentation and similar cases of action at a distance to be naturally impossible.⁴²

Note that this second author also changes his physical explanation, locating the original source of movement in the living person: it is the murderer’s agitated spirits that are sent forth and cause the victim’s (mostly dead) blood to pour forth. Such a physical explanation, without mentioning a divine judgment, is repeated in another “Salernitan” collection, called the *Questiones Alani*, found in a manuscript of ca.1230–1240, owned by the cathedral library of Notre Dame, and likely made in Paris. This “Alanus” adds several important details: cruentation occurs only up to the third day after death, the agitated spirits of the murderer actually cause the corpse’s blood to dissolve and grow more subtle and flowing (*fluxibilem*), and this transfer of spirits can occur only in the rare case when the wound is uncovered and the murderer leaning right over it.⁴³

41 “*Queritur quare interfectore presente sanguis fluit interempti?* Responsio. Divina ultio est, ut commoveatur ad penitendum. Vel ipse interfectore est commotus in sua conscientia, unde commoventur spiritualia, que commota spiritum et fumum a se emittunt qui commovent aera. Aere commoto mediante, anhelitus defertur usque ad corpus interfecti. Quod corpus quia recens est, calefit. Unde humores commoventur et inde fit eruptio sanguinis.” *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, ed. Lawn, #Ba82 (p. 183).

42 Steven P. Marrone, “Magic and the Physical World in Thirteenth-Century Scholasticism,” in *Evidence and Interpretation in Studies on Early Science and Medicine. Essays in Honor of John E. Murdoch*, ed. Edith Dudley Sylla and William R. Newman (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 180–85.

43 “*Questio. Cum aliquis est interfectus, si supervenit interfectore sanguis fluet ex vulnere, et hoc usque ad tertium diem.... Ex spiritibus autem, et gladio sic mutato, et aere innascitur*

Cruentation was never as common in the historical record as *mumia*, but like *mumia* it remained an acceptable belief about post-mortem corpse animation among the learned elite for at least another five centuries. What concerns us most here is the context of its first appearances in historical, literary, and scientific sources, all occurring at the same time that revenants are demonized and then excluded from orthodox belief and that *mumia* is being reinterpreted as a virtuous composite of spices and corpse fluids. What learned authors thought corpses could do after death was being both limited and expanded: they were becoming less mobile, less independent, but there was an increasing variety in the modes of these more passive forms of animation.

Dissection

A pattern should be obvious now. At roughly the same time as the peak of revenant stories, at the same time as the redefinition of *mumia* in Latin pharmaceutical manuals, and at the same time as the first reports of cruentation, we find also the revival of interest in human anatomy and the first recorded human dissections in the Middle Ages. To the modern observer, the cadaver used for dissection seems far removed from any notion of the living dead or corpse animation. A prerequisite of dissection would surely be that the anatomical specimen is completely dead. And, to be sure, my final example here is the least “animated” of any sort of corpse animation, but I include it here as an indication of another new development in the scholastic age concerning the uses made of corpses and beliefs about what corpses could tell the living. Both dissection and cruentation were used around the turn of the thirteenth century in legal settings (and not medical) to investigate murder; both represent cases where the living sought proof or evidence of causation from the body of a dead person.

The first treatises on human anatomy written in Europe for nearly a millennium, since the time of Galen in the second century AD, were produced in and around the southern Italian city of Salerno in the early twelfth century. Inspired by their close readings of Hippocrates and Galen, the Salernitan scholars agreed that studying the insides of a body by dissection would benefit philosophy in general and medical practice in particular. Another step in the rise of dissection in the scholastic era was the translation into Latin of works by Aristotle that presented animal and human anatomy in a positive and progressive light. Aristotle advocated dissection and even vivisection in his book on animals.⁴⁴ Galen, a devotee of Aristotle, said that the hidden, internal organs can give prognostic signs that could help a doctor

quidam calor, qui cum spiritibus infusus retinetur et conservatur in membro vulnerato, et agens in sanguinem ipsum dissolvit. Sed non sufficit ipsum ita resolvere et subtiliare ita ut fluxibilem reddat quia absente interfecore non habet simile quo excitetur ut fortiter subtiliet. Sed cum postea supervenit interfector et parum moratur supra cadaver, vulnere manente discooperto, et inspiratio interfectoris usque ad corpus interfecti libere possit pervenire et vulnus subintrare.” *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, ed. Lawn, #N13 (pp. 287–88).

44 Roger French, *Dissection and Vivisection in the European Renaissance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 1999), 12–13.

determine the outcome of a disease, and therefore every doctor must be skilled in anatomy. However, all of the early Salernitan anatomical demonstrations (such as the *Anatomy of the Pig* and the *Second Salernitan Demonstration*⁴⁵) were performed on pigs, rather than humans. It seems human cadavers were too difficult to obtain and that the pig anatomy closely enough approximated the human. They also consciously imitated Galen in his choice of animals, for he practiced dissection on dogs, pigs, and apes, though probably not on any intact human corpse.

For anatomists to make the transition from pigs to humans, they had to be convinced of a real need for cutting open a human body. It was not that medieval people had any qualms about opening and dismembering corpses. Historians of anatomy, like Katharine Park and Roger French, have convincingly demonstrated that “mutilation by dissection of the dead human body was not of itself objectionable.”⁴⁶ In fact, what anatomists would eventually do to bodies was less destructive than the dismemberment or quartering ordered as judicial punishments,⁴⁷ or even than the routine disemboweling and even boiling of royal and noble corpses that was common in northern Europe (it was called the *mos teutonicus*, “the German custom,” by appalled Italians).⁴⁸ This was done for the wealthy, kings especially, to prepare their bodies for embalming and to bury their various limbs and entrails in multiple places, to benefit them with multiple sets of prayers.

A significant impetus for human dissection came not from the doctors, but from the lawyers. The revival of Roman law in the twelfth century, when joined to a renewed study or rediscovery of Aristotle’s works on logic and physics, increased the burden of doubt in legal cases and encouraged judges to require more tangible forms of proof than an oath or an ordeal. This developed into the use of physicians as expert witnesses in judicial cases, such as in supervision of torture and homicide investigations.⁴⁹ During the thirteenth century, civil and church lawyers began to see the legal possibilities of evidence drawn from the corpse in cases of suspicious death, and they turned to physicians and anatomists for evidence.⁵⁰ An early case comes from around 1200, when a priest caught a thief redhanded and struck him. The thief escaped, only to be killed by the parishioners. Since a priest may have been guilty of manslaughter, the case was sent all the way to Pope Innocent III (r. 1198–1216), who in a decretal ordered a physician to inspect the thief’s corpse to determine whether the priest or parishioners caused the fatal blow. This is one of several cases in which Innocent III requested physicians and surgeons to inspect

45 The latter work is discussed and translated by Faith Wallis in *Medieval Medicine: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 159–74.

46 French, *Dissection and Vivisection in the European Renaissance*, 11.

47 Katherine Royer, *The English Execution Narrative, 1200–1700* (New York: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 37–39.

48 Park, “The Life of the Corpse,” 112–13.

49 Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 353.

50 Joseph Shatzmiller, “The Jurisprudence of the Dead Body: Medical Practition [sic] at the Service of Civic and Legal Authorities,” in *Micrologus* 7. *Il cadavere* (1999): 223–30.

injuries or corpses, in order that he could render a fair verdict in light of both natural and divine knowledge.⁵¹

It is not known if dissections were actually performed in these cases overseen by Innocent III, but references to post-mortem internal examinations increase by the end of the thirteenth century, not only for medical and judicial purposes, but also for funeral rituals and births. The first conclusive evidence of human dissection comes in the midst of this period of changing attitudes about surgery and surgeons. Fra Salimbene records that in 1286 a physician in Cremona dissected the body of a victim of a pestilential illness to look for pathological signs. In 1302 the Bolognese physician Bartolomeo da Varignana was summoned by civic judges to open the body of one Azzolino degli Onesti, who was suspected to have died by poisoning. The court trusted Bartolomeo's conclusion that Azzolino had died of an excess of blood in the vena cava, and not of poisoning. It is against this medical and legal background that Mondino dei Luzzi, a professor of medicine at the University of Bologna, taught what is believed to be the first course of anatomy based on human dissection between 1316 and 1326. He wrote a textbook to accompany his lectures and refers to two human dissections made before he taught, so he may have been anatomizing humans as early as 1300 or so.⁵²

At the start of the fourteenth century the interrogation of human corpses through close analysis or even dissection was rapidly becoming a standard and acceptable practice in schools of medicine and courts of law. Katharine Park has argued persuasively that the rise of dissection was due as much to the learned physician's desire for knowledge of human anatomy as to a set of non-academic "dissectionlike practices – embalming, autopsy, fetal excision" in practice during the later Middle Ages.⁵³ Michael McVaugh also has suggested that this sudden openness to human dissection reflected popular reception of the teaching of Galenic anatomy around Bologna in the 1260s, particularly by the physician Taddeo Alderotti and the surgeon William of Saliceto.⁵⁴ Surgical anatomy was a new field and was developed by a rising class of literate surgeons, mostly French and Italian. One was Henri de Mondeville, who appealed to the authority of Galen to validate a surgeon's knowledge of anatomy: "it is necessary for a surgeon to know anatomy, so that he doesn't confuse a broad ligament with a membrane, or a round with a nerve, and thereby make mistakes as he practices."⁵⁵

To these arguments for the rise of dissection in the later scholastic era I would like to add the influence of the changes in attitudes toward revenants and corpses

51 Ynez Violé O'Neill, "Innocent III and the Evolution of Anatomy," *Medical History* 20 (1976): 429–33.

52 French, *Dissection and Vivisection in the European Renaissance*, 13, 34–35.

53 Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 15.

54 McVaugh, *The Rational Surgery of the Middle Ages* (Florence: SISMEL, 2006), 239.

55 McVaugh, *The Rational Surgery*, 69. See also Marie-Christine Pouchelle, *The Body and Surgery in the Middle Ages*, trans. Rosemary Morris (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), for more on Henri de Mondeville's ideas on surgery, anatomy, and dissection.

that I have been charting: the move from revenants to *mumia* and cruentation as the most acceptable forms of corpse animation encouraged scholars to look more to corpses, and increasingly to their internal organs and fluids, for answers about natural causation and the composition of human beings.

Corpses and scholastic theology

The abandonment of active revenants in favor of passively animated corpses was gradual, taking place roughly between 1130 and 1230. During this transitional century, revenants are described frequently, but they presented a problem for learned reporters, not because they returned from the dead (recall that ghosts caused no such anxiety), but rather because of their corporeality, the fact that they had or are bodies. It became more difficult for the learned clergy, many of whom were also natural philosophers, to imagine that a soul would ever come to reside in a dead body, no matter how briefly or how sinful the returning soul. This difficulty was created by the many twelfth-century thinkers who promoted a new definition of a human being as a balanced unity of body and soul, what Caroline Walker Bynum calls the “psychosomatic person.” According to this new definition, personal fulfillment came only through the fitting conjunction of a good body with a good soul, an idea which flew in the face of centuries of Augustinian theology, which had defined a person as a potentially good soul trapped in a mostly evil body. Theologians of the High Middle Ages thus also recast death as a temporary disjunction of body and soul, a splitting of the psychosomatic person, which would be healed only in the General Resurrection of the dead at the end of time.⁵⁶

This new psychosomatic theology, popularized especially through its presence in Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* (ca.1150), which was required reading of all students of theology by the thirteenth century, had the potential to completely erase revenants from clerical records, if not from popular belief.⁵⁷ The increased focus during the twelfth century on the imminent reunification of bodies and souls, both blessed and wicked, neutralized any perceived need for the earlier, temporary reunification

56 Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), Chapter 4, “Psychosomatic Persons and Reclothed Skeletons: Images of Resurrection in Spiritual Writing and Iconography,” 156–99. In my approach to animated corpses, I am consciously following a model popularized by Bynum in a variety of her works over the last quarter century, by taking seriously both the abstruse discussions of scholastic theologians and the popular beliefs of average Christians, and interpreting the two in light of each other to produce a finer synthetic understanding of medieval culture. Much of Bynum’s research on high medieval religion revolves around the concept of materiality, and she has repeatedly argued that the corporeality of saints, relics, and tombs, of discussions of hellfire, purgatorial punishments, and the final resurrection is absolutely central to understanding medieval religion after the twelfth century.

57 See Philipp W. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 105–108, for an introduction to the Lombard’s thought on human bodies and souls. See also Clare Monagle, *Orthodoxy and Controversy in Twelfth-Century Religious Discourse. Peter Lombard’s Sentences and the Development of Theology* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

of body and soul in the form of revenants. The Lombard further obviated a need for revenants by describing post-lapsarian mankind as somehow dead already. He remarked in his *Sentences* (II, d. 29, Proemium), concerning the punishment of Adam for original sin, “he now had a dead body because of sin” (*sed quia per peccatum jam mortuum corpus habebat*). That is to say, now that he had sinned, he was liable to die, had a body that could die, and therefore was as good as dead already – a walking corpse. The imperfect tense used here – *habebat*, literally, “he was having an already dead body” – is important for stressing the past and present reality of death for sinful humanity. Though this statement seems to paint a particularly dreary picture of the human condition, this new psychosomatic theology encouraged a more positive interpretation of the unity of body and soul in this life and of their reunification in the life to come. But Peter Lombard could not destroy a widespread and popular belief overnight and that, of course, was not his intention. For nearly a century after he wrote we find among clerical authors a conflict of ideas about revenants and corpses: for some authors, dead bodies became more fully dead, and less likely to become revenants, while for others, dead bodies became more active and more likely to rise and terrorize the living. Of course, two mutually exclusive ideas can exist within the same textual community, but what I am highlighting here are some of the repercussions of this intellectual conflict.

That conflict can be understood better by looking ahead to the side that “won,” namely those theologians who advocated the view that dead bodies remain dead and cannot be joined to their souls for the duration of death. This view became formalized, like so many theological ideas, in the teaching of Thomas Aquinas in the 1250s and 1260s. Aquinas’ views on corpses were shaped by his firm belief in the unicity of form in human nature; that is, there is only one form or pattern for human nature, the soul, which is sufficient to turn undefined prime matter into a human being and to maintain the continuity of one’s own body between death and the General Resurrection.⁵⁸ Aquinas, like many of his scholastic predecessors, also equated the Christian soul (*anima*) with the medical *spiritus* (or *pneuma*) derived from Galenic tradition, and distinguished both from a more physical *virtus* found in the flesh itself.⁵⁹ At death, the body’s *virtus* is extinguished and the *anima/spiritus* departs the body, leaving no substantial form to make that corpse any sort of a person. Thus for Aquinas, the notion of an animated corpse is a contradiction in terms, a logical impossibility. A body *qua* body is alive, and a dead body is only a “body” as a term of convenience, as there is no “formal continuity between the living body and the corpse.”⁶⁰ A corpse is of another species entirely, mere matter

58 An excellent introduction to the topic is still M. De Wulf, *De unitate formae*. Gilles de Lessines. Les Philosophes du Moyen Âge, 1 (Louvain-Paris: Institut supérieur de philosophie de l’Université, 1902).

59 Caciola, “Wraiths, Revenants, and Ritual,” 7–9, 44. See also M.-D. Chenu, “*Spiritus*. Le vocabulaire de l’âme au XIIe siècle,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 41 (1957): 209–32; James J. Bono, “Medical Spirits and the Medieval Language of Life,” *Traditio* 40 (1984): 91–130.

60 Park, “The Life of the Corpse,” 132.

that shares certain accidents with living bodies. Writing in his *Summa contra Gentiles* on the subject of sin, Aquinas makes an aside on the nature of life in bodies and life in souls which clarifies further his thought on corpses: “The body lives according to its nature because it is united with the soul, which is its principle of life. So the body, made alive through the soul, moves on its own; but a dead body either remains unmoving, or is moved only by an external thing.”⁶¹ Aquinas is here using what is by this time common scholastic knowledge about the nature of dead bodies to make a more nuanced point about the life and movement of souls. So, in this case, he does not explain what the “external thing” moving a corpse might be, but we can assume that he means divine intervention or demonic possession.

Arguing against the Thomist unicity of form were a group of scholastic philosophers, most notably St Bonaventure, Henry of Ghent, and Duns Scotus, who described a plurality of substantial forms in human nature.⁶² They claimed that human nature requires both the soul and a *forma corporeitatis*, or “corporeal form,” and that the latter acts as a link between body and soul. Like many innovations in scholastic philosophy, Latin scholastic theologians probably derived *forma corporeitatis* from ideas in the Islamic world. Avicenna had argued for something like the *forma corporeitatis*, while Averroes denied that matter itself had its own form, but was rather defined only by a set of accidents, a debate mirrored by the Thomists and the Scotists. In the Christianized version of Avicenna’s teaching, both forms (soul and corporeal form) are eternal, but between death and resurrection they remain separate, the soul, which is the spiritual form, going to Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory, and the “corporeal form” dwelling in or near the corpse.⁶³ Aquinas and his students, mostly Dominicans of course, explicitly rejected corporeal form (*Summa theologiae* Ia q. 76 a. 4, a. 6), but that did not prevent the idea gaining some traction in the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; it would not be until much later that Thomas’ ideas were considered nearly unimpeachable. Later Thomists were still left with the problem of what was the essence of a corpse: what informed a dead body so that we know it is a dead body? They were obliged to posit a *forma*

61 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 3, cap. 139, n. 17: “Vivit enim corpus naturaliter per hoc quod animae unitur, quae est ei principium vitae. Corpus autem, vivificatum per animam, ex seipso movetur: sed corpus mortuum vel immobile manet, vel ab exteriori tantum movetur.”

62 M. De Wulf, *De unitate formae*. Gilles de Lessines, 10–42. On whether Aquinas ever embraced a plurality of forms, see John F. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas and the Unity of Substantial Form,” in *Philosophy and Theology in the Long Middle Ages. A Tribute to Stephen F. Brown*, ed. Kent Emery, Jr., Russell L. Friedman, and Andreas Speer (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 117–54.

63 A. Hyman, “Aristotle’s ‘First Matter’ and Avicenna’s and Averroes’ ‘Corporeal Form,’” in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1965), I, 385–406; Dag Nikolaus Hasse, “Influence of Arabic and Islamic Philosophy on the Latin West,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/arabic-islamic-influence> (accessed June 6, 2016).

cadaverica, which is not essential to a human (*i.e.* living) being, in place of the substantial *forma corporeitatis*.⁶⁴

I am, of course, working backwards by arguing about twelfth-century ideas using thirteenth-century ones, but in some respects corporeal form is essentially an erudite and refined version of the widespread belief in an animating principle remaining in corpses. For example, Claude Lecouteux argues that revenants, especially Icelandic *draugar*, could be explained best by positing a “multiple soul,” one part of which goes to the afterlife, and one or more parts that animate the corpse, objects, or animals.⁶⁵ The various types of corpse animation, revenants included, flourishing in the scholastic age can be understood in light of either Lecouteux’s “multiple soul” or later theories of corporeal form. Take, for instance, the revenant-fighting techniques in stories from both England and Iceland: in many of them, the revenant is put to rest only by the complete destruction of the corpse, usually by burning. That this was a supposedly common procedure is evident in one of William of Newburgh’s stories about a relatively peaceful revenant, the corpse of a man from Buckinghamshire who haunted his wife and his brothers at night, returning to his grave during the day. The usual mob of locals, possibly with pitchforks in hand, met with their archdeacon, who referred the case to the bishop of Lincoln, Hugh of Avalon. Many of the bishop’s advisors recommended digging up the corpse and burning it, a method they claimed had been used successfully before in England. Bishop Hugh, however, insisted that God allowed the revenant to haunt them because the man’s soul needed forgiveness. Hugh laid it to rest by placing an episcopal charter of absolution on the corpse’s chest. No fires were necessary.

This is not the case in William’s three other stories, in which all the revenants are hunted down and burned to ashes to prevent their return, exactly as the bishop’s advisors recommended. Several scholars have rightly noted that in these cases, the revenant is probably animated by the Devil, and not by the soul with divine permission, as if that sufficed to explain why the former had to be violently burned and the latter canonically put to rest.⁶⁶ But the insistence on the complete destruction of the corpse is not consistent with an argument of revenancy by demonic possession. A simple exorcism should suffice to drive out the inhabiting demon, leaving the corpse unmolested like the innocent unsouled matter it is, if we were to take a strictly Thomist position. The problem with that position (apart from anachronism) is that most descriptions of revenants assume a shared identity between the soul of the dead person and his or her corpse. The corpse remembers, as it were, the soul that once inhabited it and must suffer or otherwise act in accordance with the sinfulness of that soul. Even in those tales of explicit possession, the devil chooses corpses of only the most sinful people (William’s three demonic cases

64 Joseph Pohle, *God, the Author of Nature and the Supernatural (De deo creante et elevante): A Dogmatic Treatise*, trans. and ed. Arthur Preuss. Second edition (St Louis: Herder, 1916), 148.

65 Lecouteux, *The Return of the Dead*, ix.

66 For example, Caciola, “Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual,” 20–22, and Watkins, *History and the Supernatural*, 182–88.

are a wealthy man, a lustful priest, and a wicked, choleric man), as if their sin left traces in their flesh that predisposed it to possession. Defining revenants is not so simple a matter as positing a binary of demonic and divine, for the period under discussion bears witness to a range of beliefs in the animation of corpses. The burning of revenants shares with the controversial doctrine of corporeal form some of the same assumptions about the lingering vitality of human corpses: as long as the dead body is at least partially intact, it retains an animating power, whether it is explained by a nameless lingering vitality, the taint of sin, a secondary soul, or a *forma corporeitatis*. By extension, these ideas about animation stemming from a power other than the eternal soul can be applied to my other examples of *mumia*, cruentation, and perhaps even dissected cadavers.

The scholastic age witnessed dramatic and overlapping developments in philosophy and theology, which included an Aristotelian natural philosophy and Galenic medicine based on observation and the search for rational causes, a psychosomatic theory of the unity of body and soul, and the formalization of the doctrine of Purgatory. These trends provoked (or reflected) an anxiety about bodies among scholars and encouraged them to embrace a range of new ideas about corpses and their potential animation. At first, during the twelfth century, these developing educational and religious movements encouraged inquisitive clergy to record and ponder the meaning of stories about revenants, the walking dead. But by the thirteenth century, in the context of universities and their faculties (whether arts, medicine, law, or theology) which were established on a foundation of Aristotelian logic, physics, and epistemology, belief in the walking dead was no longer acceptable. Revenants were split in two: their dead bodies became objects completely subject to natural laws and their souls became purely incorporeal, capable of contact with the material world as ghosts or visions, but incapable of reuniting with the body until the General Resurrection. Nonetheless, the need to see some sort of animation persist in human bodies after death was too strong, and cruentation, *mumia*, and dissection replaced revenants as the acceptable forms of corpses that act or speak.

4

WOMEN, DANCE, DEATH, AND LAMENT IN MEDIEVAL SPAIN AND THE MEDITERRANEAN: JEWISH, CHRISTIAN, AND MUSLIM EXAMPLES

Cia Sautter

According to historic accounts, Jewish women have been experts on grief through their ritual lament traditions. Given all available information, this practice was seen as a means of dealing with the profound sense of sadness that comes with loss and death. Viewed as a symbolic Dance of Death, the women's typical behavior of wailing, stamping feet, and clapping hands may be construed as a means of collective purging the body and soul of grief. Documentation of Jewish women as lament leaders in medieval Spain is sparse, yet the *Qinas*, *Planyideras*, *Llaronas*, or more commonly, *Endechas* appear to have been respected for their services for mourning. Medieval Spanish records and continuing Sephardic history reveal that the work of the *Endechas* was an established tradition among Jewish women, and that they led funeral lament rituals for Christians and Muslims, as well as Jews. Accounts of the *Endechas*' performances are fascinating, as evidence of women-led ritual involving specialized movement and rhythm that was apparently important for Sephardic communities. The story of their practice is also an excellent means of exploring dance and death in the Middle Ages. First examining the details of the *Endechas*' *danza* or ritual death dance, I will briefly compare Christian and Muslim examples.

I am defining women's lament traditions as danced ritual for two primary reasons. First, biblical and rabbinic texts indicate a long history of Jewish women's mourning leadership, with specialized movement associated with mourning. Additionally, comparisons of archeological material from Mediterranean countries clearly depict women as leaders of lament in dance and movement. That is, their movements were extraordinary and rhythmic, used for bereavement and death rituals. While some may regard their motions as static, forced expression of grief, their pattern of actions allowed for improvisation and adaptation.¹

1 Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory: Ritual Practice* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 82–83 on ritual process.

In past exploration of this topic, I examined ethnographic details culled from various forms of documentation on the *Endechas*, overall considering the importance of women's lament leadership within Sephardic Jewish tradition. I labeled it the "Rachel" tradition, based on the biblical passage where Rachel is said to be weeping for her children (Jer. 31:15). Contra some post-modernist cultural critique of such rituals as a means of re-enforcing gender limitation,² I considered post-colonialist views, acknowledging the function of women's roles in a gendered society, and how women used them to expand or even defy social limitation.³ My purpose was to force readers to reevaluate how women's history is conveyed, rather than focusing on the function of the lament tradition. In contrast, Tova Gamliel's 2007 study on Yemenite Jewish women's lament traditions emphasizes anthropological criticism of death customs and wailing, questioning both classical male and more recent feminist evaluations.⁴ Her findings are pertinent to this study, and women's lament traditions as a whole. However, I am still more concerned with how the story of the medieval Spanish women is told, and specifically why there is a relative paucity of information about them. In order to gain more understanding of their context in the medieval world, I compare women's lament leadership within Islamic practices, especially through the recent work of Leor Halevi.⁵

Dances for lament and death are certainly not unique to Jewish practice. There is good evidence that Muslim, and even some Christian women served as *Endechas* in medieval Spain. So it is even more curious that Jewish women were noted performers of cultural lament rituals in Muslim and Christian Spain, from approximately 700 CE to the Expulsion of Jews in 1492. This is perhaps due to the strength of the lament tradition within Judaism. While the other western religions did have significant mourning practices, it is significant that Jewish lament appears to have left a lasting legacy of song and movement that may have influenced some Dance of Death theatre traditions, and most probably the development of flamenco in post-Expulsion Spain.⁶

Official traditions in overview

Biblical passages mention lamenting women without apparent condemnation, and as a normative practice. Likewise rabbinic records mention this specific women's

- 2 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, London: Routledge, 1989); and *Undoing Gender* (New York, London: Routledge, 2004).
- 3 Kwok Pui-Lan and Laura E. Donaldson, *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt, ed., *Judaism Since Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Cia Sautter, *The Miriam Tradition: Teaching Embodied Torah* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010).
- 4 Gamliel, Tova, "Textual Categories and Gender Images In a Women's Wailing Performance," *Social Analysis* 51.3 (2007): 23–54.
- 5 Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
- 6 Sautter, *Miriam Tradition*, 113–127.

ritual tradition with perhaps an even favorable view. In contrast, there are early medieval Christian and Muslim records that condemn death dance practices as pagan superstition. An overview of these records provides clues as to how women's lament dance customs developed, how women led lament in their communities, and why their behavior was favored, tolerated, or denounced by male religious leaders.

Noteworthy biblical passages on lamenting women include Jeremiah 9:16–21, where the prophet commands the daughters of Jerusalem to mourn for the loss of the city. He actually orders them to wail, as this is the word of the Lord.

Summon the dirge-singers, let them come;
Send for the skilled women, let them come
Let them quickly start a wailing for us,
That our eyes may run with tears,
Our pupils flow with water...(16–17)

Hear, O women, the word of the Lord,
Let your ear receive the word of His mouth,
And teach your daughters wailing,
And one another lamentation.
For death has climbed through our windows,
Has entered our fortresses,
To cut off the babes from the streets,
Young men from the squares....(19–20)⁷

A passage from Ezekiel 32:16 also seems to condone the lament made by women, but for the loss of Egypt.

This is a dirge, and it shall be intoned;
The women of the nations shall intone it,
They shall intone it over Egypt and all her multitude – declares the Lord God.⁸

A passage specific to Israel, 2 Chronicles 35:25, describes mourning at the funeral of King Josiah. The passage relates that both men and women performed for this event, “as is done to this day” by “the singers, both male and female” commemorating Josiah in their lamentations. These laments “became customary in Israel, and were incorporated into the [written] laments.”⁹ Though men were a part of this formal ceremony, women were clearly professional mourning leaders.

According to Juliana Claassens, the women mentioned in Jeremiah 9 “are literally called ‘wise women.’” She notes this phrase “can also be translated as

7 *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985), 789–790.

8 *Tanakh*, JPS Translation, 948.

9 *Tanakh*, JPS Translation, 1623.

‘skilled women’ [who]... constituted a professional trade that required training.” They performed “on the appropriate occasion (a funeral or a national tragedy like the one that form the backdrop of Jeremiah 9).”¹⁰ The “wailing women not only had to be able to draw on the reservoir of lament handed down through the generations, but they also had to adapt these laments to suit the particular need of the current situation...”¹¹ Maera Schreiber adds that the book of Lamentations uses a female “persona” several times, as women were commonly lament leaders.¹²

Actions made in connection with death rituals in the Bible include *misped*, meaning “beating the breast,” *bakah* or crying for mourning, and *sabab* for a funeral procession. The word *sabab*, to go round, might be reflected in the Sephardim practice of circling around a funeral bier.¹³ As suggested in some biblical passages, the women’s lament might include the use of the flute, plus specific actions. A passage from the Mishnah on a “proper” Jewish burial for a wife provides more detail on how and why wailing, the flute, and women are connected, as well as rabbinic attitudes concerning the lament tradition:

Rabbi Yehuda says: Even a pauper in Israel shall not employ less than two “flutes (*halilin*) and a wailing woman” (Ketuvot IV.4). This however, was a time-honored custom, but it was not regarded as a religious duty that would overrule the commandment of Sabbath rest.¹⁴

Then Rabbi Yehuda explains: “One waits for nightfall close to the Sabbath-boundary when the affairs of a bride or a dead man have to be arranged” (Shabbat 23.4).

Schreiber adds that in the Mishnah Ketuvot passage “Rabbi Yehuda rules that even the poorest husband must provide one lament-singing woman for his wife’s funeral, as a minimum display of honor.”¹⁵

In the Talmud, compiled from around the third century, the actions of mourning women are regulated by rabbis, who refer to the Jeremiah passage when they discuss the proper conduct of *Qinot* or keening.¹⁶ Schreiber adds that in “the Talmud, we find a suite of poetic fragments which suggest that the lament, as a standard feature of ritual life, belonged largely to the women who gathered to lead the community in the fires.” She points to a line attributed to the “sage Raba” in

10 L. Juliana Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God’s Delivering Presence in the Old Testament* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 27.

11 Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife*, 27.

12 Maera Schreiber, “Contemporary Reflection on Chayei Sarah,” in *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary* (New York: URJ Press, 2008), 129–130.

13 Meyer Gruber, *Aspects of Non-verbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 48–59.

14 Isidore Epstein, *The Talmud* (London: Sonica Press, 1938); see also Schreiber, “Contemporary Reflection on Chayei Sarah,” 130.

15 Schreiber, “Contemporary Reflection on Chayei Sarah,” 130.

16 Sendrey, 168; Epstein, Mo’ed Ketan 3:8D–E, 3:9.

Moed Katan 28b: “The women of Shkanziv say: ‘Woe for his leaving / woe for our grieving.’”¹⁷ But the Bible and Talmud also present us with specific types of movements enacted for the process of “keening,” including the clapping of hands (*safak* and *tipah*) and beating of limbs, and playing of hand drums (*erus*’ and also *‘rebi’it*’), both referring to clapping.¹⁸ The behavior was apparently typical of patterned movement for funerals:

Rabbinical writers relate that, at funeral ceremonies, the mourners clapped their hands (*safak*), and beat rhythmically their thighs and other limbs (*tipa*). All these, to 5th centuries CE, the practice of the wailing we already know, were habitual practices during secular dances, and they have also been used in dances honoring the dead. Even when funeral dances have been abolished, these former attributes of the dance survived.¹⁹

The Mishnah, the earlier portion of the Talmud, mentions in Mo’ed Ketan, that “R. Ishmael” gave specific directions to the wailing women as to when and how they could conduct their mourning practice. When “they ... are near to the bier” they “may clap their hands” ... and also “on the first days of the months and at Dedication and at Purim they may sing lamentations ... and clap their hands [for the dance].” But Rabbi Ishmael insists that there was to be no wailing, “lamentation” or hand clapping “after the corpse has been buried.”²⁰ Thus we learn some of the motions involved in the lamenting practices of women. Sendrey adds that there was typically also a custom of “walking seven times around the bier during which seven short prayers are recited or chanted.” All prayers ended with “and continually may he walk in the land of life, and may his soul rest in the bond of life.”²¹

Later Sephardic records of the practices of the *Endechas* appear to be very consistent with biblical and Talmudic accounts of women’s lament leadership practices. Women led mourning, with actions that included contorting their bodies and crying. They also probably beat their limbs and clapped their hands as part of their ritual performance. While there is a gap in information from the Talmudic period to medieval Spain, the patterns of behavior appear similar to what Sendrey describes. Apparently following Torah traditions, lament continued to be a role for women, complete with choreographed movement. The specific practices for grieving from medieval Spain are examined below, with added insight from medieval Christian and Muslim practice. Before considering this information though, it is helpful to review Christian and Muslim mourning customs prior to the medieval period.

17 Schreiber, “Contemporary Reflection on Chayei Sarah,” 130.

18 Alfred Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel* (New York: Philosophical Society, 1969), 471.

19 Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel*, 473.

20 Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel*, 472.

21 Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel*, 472.

Christian and Islamic stances to the practice

Like Judaism, Christianity and Islam both have their birth in the Near East, where women's dramatic mourning dance customs have a long and ancient history. Both of these religions are based on or have great respect for the Torah, but have their own unique scriptural traditions, as well as an understanding of how a religion relates to a culture. Though keening women were the norm in ancient and even medieval Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures, historical records indicate that there was ambivalence toward if not disdain for keening women in Christianity and Islam. The issue was not necessarily about women leading the community in a ritual practice, but fear that the custom is pagan and would mislead the faithful.

Early Christian texts do mention death and death customs. Matthew 9.23, for instance, deals with a supposed death of a little girl, and alludes to the playing of a flute for mourning. There is no explicit mention of dance or ritual movement in this passage though. The non-canonical Acts of John includes a "Round Dance of the Cross" ritual that anticipates Jesus's death and resurrection. As part of the dance Jesus chants, "I will mourn, beat all your breasts."²² Whether or not the ritual was performed is uncertain. Following pagan custom early Christians did gather for song and dance to commemorate the dead, but these gatherings were on the anniversary of a person's death, rather than during the time of interment of a body. The "Syriac Apostolic Constitutions" in around 380 CE warned that Christians should not "overindulge" in such activities, where "in the West, Augustine tried to alter such behavior."²³ In contrast, some early Islamic records indicate that there was severe criticism, if not outright bans on funeral practices borrowed from pagan practices. This included direct opposition to wailing women by Muslim scholars. There is no specific mention of wailing women in the Qur'an, but Sura 60:12 does state that "the believing women pledged not to associate any deity with Allah; to refrain from theft, adultery, and slander; not to murder their children; and 'not to disobey' the Prophet in ma'ruf."²⁴ While the definition of the term ma'ruf is not clear, and may mean to be good or follow tradition, some "exegetes from Mesopotamia and the eastern Mediterranean" determined that the "prophet Mohammed specifically had wailing in mind."²⁵

In contrast to the Qur'an, there are several hadith concerning preparing a body for death, and for the proper behavior of women mourning, especially for the loss of a husband. The emphasis in these passages appears to be on modest behavior, with an outstanding passage from Hadith Bukhari 1:103:

We were forbidden to mourn for more than three days for a dead person, except for a husband, for whom a wife should mourn for four months and ten

22 Elaine Pagels, "To the Universe Belongs the Dancer," *Parabola* 4.2 (1979): 8.

23 Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 26.

24 Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 125–126.

25 Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 125–126

days (while in the mourning period) we were not allowed to put kohl in our eyes, nor perfume ourselves, nor wear dyed clothes, except a garment of 'Asb (special clothes made in Yemen). But it was permissible for us that when one of us became clean from her menses and took a bath, she could use a piece of a certain kind of incense. And it was forbidden for us to follow funeral processions.²⁶

The last line of the hadith may too refer specifically to keening traditions of women. Some Islamic pietists in the Mesopotamian city of Kufa associated the wailing of women with earlier pagan practices and “challenged the ritual,” contending that it was a form of torture, based on a “prophetic saying.” They also claimed “women seeking allegiance to Islam had pledged to Muhammad that they would desist from practicing the ritual.”²⁷ Their decisions were based on interpretation of tradition, which does leave an option for wailing. However there is an entire section dealing with funerals and mourning in the Hadith Bukhari collection, and several passages deal specifically with weeping, wailing, and women. All indicate that women’s wailing leadership was not permissible, and one passage even compares Jewish funeral practices. Attributed to the prophet Mohammed’s wife Aisha, the passage states that a “Jewess” is “tortured in her grave” because her “relatives are weeping over her” (32:376). Likewise, chapter 33 begins with a passage stating that Umar instructed mourners not to “throw dust on their head or cry loudly.” Similar passages follow, and a previous passage states that women “were forbidden to accompany funeral processions but not strictly” (29: 368).²⁸

In relating the details of the limitations placed on mourning and especially women’s ritual lament leadership in Islam, Leor Halevi deals specifically with a more conservative group from eighth-century Iraq. This was a community living a great distance from Spain, to be sure, and their comments are from the very earliest of what might be considered the medieval period. Nevertheless, the development of Hadith and scholarly literature demeaning the practices of women’s ritual mourning leadership is in stark contrast to the rabbinic statements on regulating rather than rejecting the ritual leadership of the wailing women. Overall, the legal and interpretive literature of Islam not only limits the practice of these women, but also seems to officially reject the practice as legitimate for the religion in most circumstances.

According to Halevi, Muslim legal commentary seemed to envision that a proper Islamic funeral would be more sedate and reasoned, unlike the practice of wailing women. “Ibn al-Mubarak (d. 797) held that the Companions of the Prophet used to recommend silence during funeral processions, during battle, and during recitations of the Qur’an.” The reason for this was “Such simple procession

26 Mohammad Muhsin Khan, *The Translation of the Meaning of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Arabic-English, 6th Revised edition (Lahore, Pakistan: Kazi Publications, 1983), vol. 1, 185–186.

27 Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 125.

28 Khan, *Translation of the Meaning of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, 212–213, 206.

seemed most appropriate because they could easily be performed in the same way for a pauper or a rich man who died in any Islamic city between Cordoba and Rayy.” There were therefore regulations set on the amount of time to wash a corpse or the how mourners would stand “in near rows” at the cemetery, and then “raise their hands to praise God at the right time, on cue.”²⁹

Medieval processional and graveside practices

The Planyideras of medieval Spain

The boundaries of medieval Spain are great in time span, and historically involved not a single, clear period of Muslim or even Christian rule. In a very general division of Iberian history, Islamic rule began around 711, with the defeat of the Visigoths, and lasted to the fall of the Moorish Caliphate in Cordoba in 1015. In 1013, though they were well educated in and even had high standing in government, Jews were expelled from Cordoba. By 1392, under Christian rule there was growing violence against Jews.³⁰ There is, of course, much controversy about whether there was really a Golden Age or *Convivencia* during any point in medieval Spain. Several scholars doubt this assessment of history for the early period of Muslim rule, and definitely in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, during the more restrictive Almoravid and repressive Almohad rule. The period of Christian recapturing and rule (*Reconquista*) did not necessarily restore or create *Convivencia*. Yet several scholars support this assessment, pointing out that there was relative, overall cooperation between people of the three religions in the early Muslim and Christian periods.³¹

Despite all controversies about whether or not there was a Golden Age of Spain, there is clear evidence that Jews had great influence on the culture of Iberia, especially in poetry and the arts. Regardless of this achievement, Avraham Grossman reveals that Spanish Jewish women were not necessarily literate, nor did they have a significant role in community life.³² Grossman’s assessment may be questioned, as there is evidence from the Cairo Geneziah and even pictorial evidence that the Sephardic community allowed women to have a voice in public.³³ Nevertheless, women’s place in society was restricted in medieval Europe and the Mediterranean.

29 Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 125.

30 Olivia Remie Constable, “Religious Coexistence in Medieval Spain,” in *Religious Foundations of Western Civilization: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 305–347.

31 See Mark R. Cohen, “‘The *Convivencia*’ of Jews and Muslims in the High Middle Ages,” in *The Meeting of Civilizations: Muslim, Christian, and Jewish*, ed. Moshe Ma’oz (Brighton, Portland, Toronto: Sussex Academic Press, 2009, 2010), 54–65; David Nirenberg, “What Can Medieval Spain Teach us about Muslim-Jewish Relations?” *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Spring 2002): 17–35.

32 Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 2004), e.g. 111–114, and 170–172.

33 Sautter, *Miriam Tradition*, 72.

So it is all the more remarkable then that Spanish Jewish women were not only allowed to serve a popular ritual function as the leaders of mourning, but that their wailing was a respected custom.

Records from the Muslim period

Evidence that *Endechas* were respected mourning leaders comes from several sources, including written and visual records, especially from the Christian period. Later evidence may be derived from practices of the Sephardic community in Morocco. Records from the very early twentieth century are helpful in understanding some of the specific details of the *Endechas*' practice as a dance or *danza*. Evidence from the Muslim period is more difficult to find, though Eliyahu Ashtor's research on the Jews of Muslim Spain provides helpful information.³⁴ Ashtor is perhaps the most well known writer of Jewish history and customs in this period. His record of an eleventh-century Jewish man's funeral reflects some of the tensions within Jewish and Muslim communities during the time of the writing, while also outlining specifics of Jewish funeral customs. Ashtor's funeral description offers insight into the background for the *Endechas*' role as mourning leaders, and some of the community customs.

Ashtor relates how one Abu Ya'kub described a funeral procession in his diary. The record is from the eleventh century, and includes mention of mourners and special rituals. The account begins with home rituals, and then the process of mourners slowly moving to the Jewish cemetery. Ashtor also notes the tension present as the funeral party approaches the Muslim section of town before proceeding to the gravesite. Specifics provided in the diary include first a shattering of vessels and kissing a dead person before the funeral. Next there is an account of the funeral procession through the Jewish quarters. The mourners gathered at the house of the "deceased," where "Abu Ya'kub ... waited with the other men in attendance before the house until the funeral cortege left for the cemetery." There, he heard "men who spoke in praise of the deceased." The funeral party then made its way to the Jewish cemetery, which "in the Spanish cities were [usually] located mainly near the city gate that was close to the Jewish neighborhood."³⁵

The trip to the cemetery involved a "procession" with "prayers and psalms," that "moved along the Jewish quarter's main thoroughfare ... After leaving the city by way of the 'Jews' Gate," the "procession turned right until it reached the cemetery." After interment, the funeral party threw "pebbles" on the gravesite, and "the oldest son of the deceased had recited the mourner's prayer (kaddish) in a voice choking with sobs"; those "at the graveyard would arrange themselves in rows to comfort the mourners."³⁶

34 Eliahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Muslim Spain* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973), 3 vols.

35 Ashtor, *The Jews of Muslim Spain*, vol. 3, 115–121.

36 Ashtor, *The Jews of Muslim Spain*, vol. 3, 115–121.

It is notable that Ashtor's account does not mention wailing women participating or leading the procession, though we know it was historically customary to have the *Endechas* lead a funeral procession. As a whole Ashtor does not include women in his history, so it is not surprising that the women mourning leaders are excluded in his report. Maria Fuente provides a bit more detail on typical roles women played in funeral preparations during this time:

[They] threw the water out of the pitchers; washed the corpse with hot water; shaved the hair of the face, armpits and other parts of the body; and bandaged the dead body. They also cut little pieces of cloth and gave them to friends, had their meals on a low table behind a door for seven days (this was called holding *cogüerzos*), avoided eating meat and consumed mostly fish, eggs, olives and the like.³⁷

According to Renee Levine Melammed, women may have been more severely restricted under Muslim rule, and were confined to their houses. This might be the reason the diary of Abu Ya'kub does not mention wailing women leading the funeral procession. But Melammed does note that women were paid for some ritual services, including washing the bodies of the deceased, and that both rabbinic and Muslim restrictions on women were a supposed rather than actual reality. Women did make contact with the community during holidays such as Passover and Sukkot, and did have a voice in the synagogue, so the time-honored custom of women's lament leaderships seems a probable reality in Muslim Spain, at least in less restrictive time periods.³⁸

Ethnomusicologist Amnon Shiloah maintains women's lament songs were a part of most Jewish cultures. He notes that Ashkenazi women sang laments about widowhood, abandonment, and bad husbands; women, birth, and death form a "symbolic connection" in such songs. As for professional wailers like the *Endechas*, he notes that they may represent "the symbolic connection between birth and death" which women experienced as mothers, but it is clear that "lamentations are a type of song exclusively sung by women," with "experts ... professionals who specialized in ... grieving and knew how to feed the flame of sorrow and weeping."³⁹ Given the historic practice of Jewish women lament leaders, it is possible to speculate that they were employed throughout both Muslim and Christian rule in Spain, but there is more clear evidence for the existence of the practice during the Christian period.

37 María Jesús Fuente, "Christian, Muslim and Jewish Women in Late Medieval Iberia," *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* 15.2–4 (2009): 323.

38 Renée Levine Melammed, "Spain" *Jewish Women's Archive* at <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/spain>. Accessed June 4, 2016.

39 Amnon Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Traditions* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 178.

Records from the Christian period – written and visual

An account of a Jewish funeral of Christian Spain mentions the employment of the *Endechas*, and paintings of the life of Jews in Spain during this period offer a glimpse of the choreographed behavior of the female mourning leaders. Written reports tell us that in fourteenth-century Seville, “Jewish and Moslem women were engaged as professional wailers by Christians” and “co-religionists.” Furthermore, “it was customary for the Spanish Jews to have women wailers at funerals,” and Jewish responsa literature of the period from Saragossa (Aragon) dealt with “employment of professional wailers.”⁴⁰ The paintings visualize some of this information about the *Endechas* (*Qinot* in Hebrew), with a specific illustration of their lamenting motions. Comments on the “qina” note that this was a widespread practice, especially in medieval Spain, so there are many depictions of the process. A fourteenth-century illustration shows “qina (lamentations), beside the deathbed on which the corpse lies.” The process of specific mourning continued “again around the coffin placed on the ground. Members of the afflicted family walked with their heads lowered and covered, their hands hidden under their robes.” Women lament experts would lead them.⁴¹

Teresa Metzger comments on the gestures of the lamenting women at the bedside of someone who died, noting that lament began at the home of the deceased. In one specific illustration “two weeping women mourners are shown making the symbolical gestures signifying grief.” Their movements include “embrac[ing] the deceased, the other raises her hands in a gesture of despair. Such mourners also clapped their hands to punctuate the lamentations they sang.” In another illustration, a woman gestures in grief through lifted arms, bent at the elbow, her hands flat, and thumbs separated from fingers. The wide position of her arms and the hand position suggest she will clap her hands. Unfortunately, Metzger’s other funeral illustrations do not include pictures of *Qinot* heading processions, though apparently they were in attendance when the body was interred.⁴²

Researchers offering reports of Sephardic practices and customs derived from Spain also claim that though the mourning women did not always lead funeral processions, they were fully engaged in carrying out significant symbolic movements for death. Scholar Paloma Diaz-Mas provides a short, focused description of wailing women in Sephardic tradition as a whole, and her information brings to life Metzger’s illustrations. The details are revealing, with the mention of dramatic actions, motions, and sounds done for “planto” [public mourning]. “The mourning” involved “gathering around the body to show one’s grief at the death by shouting, crying, and injuring oneself. During the ceremony, it was not unusual for people

40 Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, trans. Louis Schaffman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1966), vol. 1, 31, 444.

41 Therese and Mendel Metzger, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages: Illuminated Hebrew Manuscripts of the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Centuries* (New York: Alpine Fine Arts, 1982), 154, 234.

42 Metzger, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*, 154, 234.

also to sing dirges.” Significantly, “those in charge of performing the ceremony were always women.”⁴³

Díaz-Mas notes that the women funeral leaders were family members of the deceased, or were professional mourners. She also mentions specific dramatic actions were used by the dirge-leading *Endechas*. These “professional criers” performed “for pay, so that by their gestures and scratches, wailing and keening, they might enhance the memory of the deceased.”⁴⁴ To compare these actions, gestures, and motions with late medieval Spain, one specific report from fourteenth-century Sargossa Spain mentions that mourners “walked home from the synagogue with a wailing woman who accompanied her dirge on a tambourine. The other women, presumably unprofessional mourners, joined her chant with clapped hands and vocalizations.”⁴⁵

In the Spanish Jews’ diaspora there are some differing accounts about the inclusion or approval of *Endechas* and their keening practices. Some scholars claim that women were traditionally not part of the funeral processions of Sephardic communities, and that they did not participate in, or at least speak during the *hakafot*, the circling around the bier.⁴⁶ This seems at odds with the findings of Díaz-Mas, Susana Weich-Shahak, and the historical practice of provoked weeping in Mediterranean cultures.⁴⁷ There is significant research stating that the *Endechas* were present at least at some point in the ritual process of death. It could be that there were prohibitions against the women’s keening practice in some communities, given local restrictions and rabbinic rulings. However, there is good documentation of the *Endechas*’ lament songs, and their use within Sephardic Jewish life. *Endechas* or laments from Sephardic diaspora communities are fairly well documented as a whole, and the keening women’s laments are one tradition in an entire practice of lamentations that were used within the Jewish liturgy and life cycle.

Manuel Alvar provides a very well-respected report of the women’s keening laments. In his small book on the *Endecha* verse tradition among the Sephardim, he offers many details about the practice of Jewish women leading funeral chants in Tetuan, Morocco. An older, classic study, it features valuable first-hand reports.⁴⁸ Alvar concentrates on the poetry lament *Endechas* verses, but he also offers background information about the wailing in Spanish history. He calls the women lament leaders “planyideras (wailing women),” and describes them “recit[ing] verses in the house of the deceased.” He presents their movement in some detail,

43 Paloma Díaz-Mas, *Sephardim: The Jews from Spain*, trans. George K. Zucker (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 32.

44 Díaz-Mas, *Sephardim*, 33.

45 Katherine Ashenburg, *The Mourner’s Dance: What to Do when People Die* (Danvers, MA: North Point Press, 2002), 48; Ruben Schindler, “Mourning and Bereavement” *OMEGA Journal of Death and Dying* 23.2 (1996): 121–129.

46 Rabbi Herbert C. Dobrinsky, *A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., and Yeshiva University Press, NY, 1986), 69–109.

47 Susana Weich-Shahak, *Judeo-Spanish Moroccan Songs for the Life Cycle/Cantares Judeo Españoles de Marruecos para el ciclo de la Vida* (Jerusalem: The Jewish Music Research Centre, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1989).

48 Manuel Alvar, *Endechas Judeo-Espanolas* (Granada: Universidad De Granada, 1953).

noting that they “flung themselves into mournful dances, as possessed, with tearing of hair, scratching the face, and piercing death cries.”⁴⁹ Alvar cites M.L. Ortega in *Los hebreos en Marruecos*. In translation the entire quote reads:

Previously, and even also today in some cities, there existed hired *planyideras* (wailing women), who recited verses in the house of the deceased and flung themselves into mournful dances, as possessed, with tearing of the hair, scratching the face, and piercing death cries. This is a custom which was perhaps imported from Spain, and disappeared.

[Antes, y aun hoy en algunas ciudades, existían plañideras mercenarias que recitaban versos en la casa mortuoria y saltaban en lugubres danzas como poseídas, mesándose los cabellos, arañándose el rostro y lanzando macabros lamentos. Ya esta costumbre, que quizá fuera importada de España, va desapareciendo.]

The last line of this quote reflects on an assumed cultural history of the practice as Spanish in origin.⁵⁰

Alvar notes that the *Endechas* recited verses of lament, while they performed a very involved formal dance (*danza*) of strong, exaggerated movement, perhaps including contractions. Elaborating on a first-hand account to explain the practice within Judaism, and the pagan or Jewish origins of the ritual, he comments that the use of the lamenting women was popular in Spain, and continued in Sephardic tradition. Women lead the event, especially in the home of the deceased.⁵¹

Susana Weich-Shahak, who studied Jewish women’s song and dance ritual traditions in Morocco, offers an example of the type of song the *Endechas* might have sung. In Ladino.

Ya crecen las hierbas
y dan de color,
y este, mi corazon,
vive con dolor.

Ya creceb kas guerbias
y dan de amarillo,
y este mi corazon
viva de suspiro.

Weich-Shahak’s translation proves this a simple, yet highly metaphoric verse.

The herbs in this field
have changed color,

49 Alvar, *Endechas Judeo-Espanolas*, 26.

50 Alvar, *Endechas Judeo-Espanolas*, 26.

51 Alvar, *Endechas Judeo-Espanolas*, 26.

and my heart; it
cries with grief.

The herbs in the field
have turned to yellow,
and my heart,
it cries with sighs
it cries with sighs.⁵²

Christian dances of death

More information on the Jewish *Endecha* “death dance” and wailing may be derived from Christian drama and dance practices. Florence Whyte studied Spanish versions of the Dance of Death dramas, suggesting that this play form is related to professional wailing women’s mourning practices:

Endechas, or lamentation, formed a part of the repertoire of the medieval jugular in Spain... Endechas were sung at funerals by mourning women called *plañideras*. A sculpted group on a monument in the old Cathedral in Salamanca shows the soul, represented as a child, accompanied by the *plañidera*, who are tearing their hair ... Lazarillo de Tormes going up the narrow steps of Toledo encountered a humble funeral procession; the corpse was carried on a litter, behind it came women in mourning ... Customs derived from Oriental habits of mourning prevailed until a surprisingly late date in the Iberian peninsula, as may be inferred from the custom of tearing the hair that we have just mentioned.⁵³

Alvar assumes that the wailing tradition of Jewish women in Morocco was imported from Spain. Whyte’s quote implies laments were widely used as part of Spanish death rituals, and the statue in the cathedral in Salamanca suggests that keening was done at Christian funerals, so was perhaps not limited to Jewish or Muslim communities in the past. A procession and dramatic movement were part of the keening, and the actual lamentations were perhaps influenced by biblical and Jewish traditions. The “oriental habits” referred to by Whyte are supposedly Jewish, based on the similarity between a Sephardic lament from the Menendez Pidal manuscript, and a Spanish lament verse in the drama *Coplas de la Muerta*. In her study *The Dance of Death*, Whyte records that “there is, in fact, such a composition” where “verbal coincidences abound” with “entire stanzas parallel” to “lines of the Coplas.” They are laments (*Endechas*), which “were sung by four Jews of Tangiers.”⁵⁴

52 Weich-Shahak, *Judeo-Spanish Moroccan Songs*, 79.

53 Florence Whyte, *The Dance of Death in Spain and Catalonia* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, Inc., 1931), 56–58.

54 Whyte, *The Dance of Death*, 59–60.

Whyte's use of the term "oriental" is disturbing, suggesting there was something objectionable about the borrowing of Jewish or Muslim practices. But her statement may also reflect that the *Coplas de la Muerta* were supposedly composed by monks "of Montserrat," who "expressed their intention of supplanting objectionable songs and dances by substitutes." This was because there were "ecclesiastical objections to profane dances in holy places" for funerals.⁵⁵ Whyte is not clear on what constituted "profane dances" for death, and if the objection included opposition to women lament leaders, or non-Christian origins of lament.

Dance done for religious events was popular in Spain, and there were even dances for deathwatches and funerals. Such a "death-watch" dance might include singing, castanets, and the regional jota dancing. E. Louis Backman provides an example of the tradition from an 1870s account of a group that kept watch for a dying child in this manner. The church did not necessarily disapprove of such activity, given that the theology was correct and hopeful concerning the afterlife. However, overall, Backman's evidence suggests that church officials disapproved of dances associated with death, especially those held in churchyards. In the medieval period they were the subject of numerous bans, because of other associated activity and a belief that one could scare off demons with round dances, hand clapping, beating drums and laughter.⁵⁶

Significant to the practice of the *Endechas*, an early eighth-century church ban ordered that women were forbidden to dance in front of churches, and at graveyards. It specifically stated that "dancing and singing by women in the church porch were forbidden," though this activity was separated out from "'devilish' songs which the public used to sing for the dead at night time to the accompaniment of loud laughter." Both were forbidden. In the tenth century, "Patriarch John III threatened with excommunication those women who visited graves in order to beat drums and dance."⁵⁷ One ban from Lerida, Spain included specific mention of "indecent ring-dances to the singing of songs, with violence, dice games and other forbidden things by which the churches and churchyards are desecrated."⁵⁸

In contrast to the bans on women's practices and graveyard dances, two outstanding movement practices related to death were the use of labyrinths within churches, and the many Dances of Death. Margaret Taylor relates "labyrinthine dances date from the eleventh century," and that for these dances "people held hands as they wound round into and out of the maze" etched on the cathedral or church floor. These actions represented the journey out of the underworld, away from Satan, and into salvation. Chartres Cathedral's labyrinth is probably the most famous, measuring forty feet across.⁵⁹ Taylor also notes that the Dance of Death

55 Whyte, *The Dance of Death*, 47–48.

56 E. Louis Backman, *Religious Dances in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine*, trans. E. Clauss (London: Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1952), 140–142.

57 Backman, *Religious Dances*, 155–156.

58 Backman, *Religious Dances*, 158.

59 Margaret Taylor, "A History of Symbolic Movement in Worship," in *Dance as Religious Studies*, ed. Doug Adams and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Crossroads Press, 1990), 23.

“was the most widely known of all the religious dances from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, and England.” Significantly, she adds that these dances started “in the cemetery or churchyard with a sermon on the certainty of death.”⁶⁰ Presented within the church, or with the leadership of clergy, the labyrinth and Dance of Death were most likely theologically acceptable to the church. In contrast, the women’s mourning practices and churchyard dances could not be as closely regulated, and there was apparently fear that they would promote pagan beliefs.

Muslim practices

Baer mentions that Muslim as well as Jewish women served as professional mourners in Spain during the Christian medieval period. Halevi also reports that, despite official Islamic rulings against keening women, they were active if not popular in Muslim lands.⁶¹ One example he provides comes from the Cairo Geneziah, where a Jewish woman insists that her funeral will include Muslim keening women.⁶² Muslim feminist scholar Leila Ahmed also reports on women’s mourning leadership in Islamic countries during the medieval period. She offers a few details of their performance, and quotes the biography of Al-Sakhawi. He describes funerals as “spectacles.” Ahmed adds that “professional female mourners might be hired to wail, beat their tambourines, and recite the fine qualities of the deceased,” but before this there would be “ritualized abuse ... of the dead.” She notes that the practice was “prohibited by Orthodox Islam,” but a ban on the activity was at one point “rescinded following the intervention of the *daminat al-maghani*, the female officer responsible for remitting ... taxes due from working women.” These women included professional female mourners. The “damina pointed out how much the treasury stood to lose in taxes if the government banned the hiring of mourners.”⁶³ Given all comments, it appears that at least in medieval Egypt professional mourning women were a popular if not regular addition to a funeral.

Considering ritual; considering history

The ethnographic details of the *Endecha* tradition can be construed from various sources, though exact historic details are uncertain for some communities. What may be most striking about the tradition in medieval, rabbinic, and descendent Sephardic sources is that the women were seldom criticized. Most literature just assumes the practice as normative. There were certain procedures and customs to follow, and at least for Jews in the Mediterranean world, those customs included women lament leaders. Though my purpose is to look at how the story of these women is told,

60 Taylor, “A History of Symbolic Movement in Worship,” 23.

61 Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 127, 133.

62 Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 136.

63 Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), 118–119.

it is still important to consider the purpose of their behavior, especially its function for a community. In order to do so, one might focus on the narrative or sung lament portion of the practice, as done by Gamliel in her report of Yemenite women's wailing traditions in modern Israel. Women did have their own sung, oral lament tradition, so there is good reason to pay attention to their verse. However, as Shiloah and other ethno-musicologists reminds us, *Endechas* or *Qinot* were an ancient musical genre dating back to the biblical period.⁶⁴ The Spanish Jewish community created its own formal synagogue *Qinot* tradition. Women's lament occurred outside the synagogue, and does have its own distinct qualities. However, from a performance perspective women's lament traditions are striking not so much because of the specific verses sung, but because of the ritualized dance movement.

Both ritual and cognitive studies inform us of the power of such movement. Catherine Bell posited that ritual happens in and through the ritual body, and it is through this deployment that ritual gains efficacy.⁶⁵ The impact on participants is instructive, with a transmission of values via symbolic actions. This occurs partially through "invariance" of rituals, meaning "actions which are performed with controlled precision, and a great deal of strict physical repetition" rather than rigid and unchanging repetition.⁶⁶ With the lamenting women, the performers and observers are visually and viscerally informed of the importance of grieving through sanctioned, time-tested symbolic behavior. It is no wonder rabbis wanted to regulate these actions.

Would such ritualized and even stereotypical *danza* actions be meaningful though? Would the commonality of the mourning women reduce the power and symbolism of their actions? Without an abundance of reports, we do not know, but cognitive theory tells us that "the specificity of such actions would make them quite effective for the mirror neuron system," symbolically communicating with the body-brain. According to Joshua Edelman, the formalist aspect of ritual seems almost perfectly designed to make use of the capacity of motor neurons. The reason for this is that the "clear, goal-directed gestures ... are part of our own set of motor skills." We identify with the gestures, and even gain a sense of group action by watching the performance of the ritual.⁶⁷ This is kinesthetic identification. Study of mirror neurons confirms how this kinesthetic identification occurs. Edelman refers to neurology scientists Sinigaglia and Rizzolatti, who call this an "understanding from the inside" and that the "neurological similarity between the experience of performing and observing an action 'allows the observer to understand directly others' actions without the necessity of any inferential processing.'"⁶⁸

64 Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Traditions*, 249 n. 3.

65 Bell, *Ritual Theory: Ritual Practice*, 98, 92–93.

66 Bell, *Ritual Theory: Ritual Practice*, 98, 92–93.

67 Joshua Edelman, "Mirror neurons and the performative epistemology of ritual," paper presented at the annual meeting of the *International Federation of Theatre Research*, Performance and Religion Working Group, Barcelona (July 2013), 10–11.

68 Edelman, "Mirror neurons," 8.

Given that strong ritualized actions can convey a deep intense feeling of grief, the *Endechas* enabled mourning for the family of the person who died. At the very least, they may have had a cathartic effect on the community. The purpose and results of their behavior may be construed without sophisticated ritual theory, and cognitive studies only confirm what seems fairly obvious, and is consistent with anthropological studies cited by Gamliel, including Urban's concept of mourning as a longing for "sociability" at a time of loss, and Durkheim on solidarity and mourning customs.⁶⁹ Wailing women mourning leaders give a community permission to formally weep, embrace, and recognize community loss. Gamliel, however, emphasizes that the women she observed mediated relationships between women and men, and life and death.⁷⁰ Utilizing feminist scholarship, Gamliel adds that beyond aiding a community in a liminal state, the "wailer performs the role of a bereaved mother ... and transforms everyone into hand-holding creatures."⁷¹ She then adds that the wailing women provide more than a signal for specific community behavior, but on a deeper level, allow "participants" to have a "transformation of consciousness" during a period of liminality.⁷² I would add that the physicality of their performances allows for an embodied response from their audience, with the viewing of actions of grief releasing emotions of grief in observers.

The *Endechas* aided the community in dealing with death, and as Richard Schechner might say, offered an edifying performance, and that popular performance became religious ritual.⁷³ The reason for their exclusion from historic records may be simply that they were commonplace, or that historians have a bad record of recognizing the importance of women's roles in society. Given the body-brain connections, and the motional and physical effects of even stylized ritual movement for death, the *Endechas* served a function in their community. In medieval times people were accustomed to ritual gestures, motions, and even dance, and they would probably find greater meaning in the activity of the wailing women.⁷⁴ However, in research and review of records on medieval keening women in Spain and the larger Mediterranean community, there are three points I consider.

First, most reports offer similar details about the behavior of the *Endechas*, with visual and written records offering comparable images on the activity of these women. There are limited written records, and those we do have that are specific to medieval Spain and descendent Sephardic culture all portray women wailing at bedsides, then leading processions to the gravesite, employing typical actions of stamping feet and clapping hands. Baer's report, Metzger's art history specifics, and Diaz-Mas and Alvar's details, along with stray historical reports from other sources

69 Gamliel, "Textual Categories and Gender Images in a Women's Wailing Performance," 47–48.

70 Gamliel, "Textual Categories and Gender Images in a Women's Wailing Performance," 42–43.

71 Gamliel, "Textual Categories and Gender Images in a Women's Wailing Performance," 49.

72 Gamliel, "Textual Categories and Gender Images in a Women's Wailing Performance," 49.

73 Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 156–157.

74 See Taylor "A History of Symbolic Movement in Worship," 15–29.

provide general and consistent details. Sendrey's account of the particulars of women's lament tradition are more exact, drawing partially from rabbinic records of what was acceptable behavior for funerals. This was an accepted unofficial ritual custom that occurred outside the synagogue, and while not officially sanctioned, was officially recognized by the rabbis. One passage from the Talmud even recognizes the importance of stopping study for a funeral or wedding procession (Ketuvot 1:17a). Many commentators note that women led these processions, and though they did not give outright support for women as ritual leaders, the rabbis at least acknowledged the importance of their role in the process of honoring a person who had died.

It was within the scope of Jewish tradition to recognize the activity of the *Endechas*, so even though women's history has been marginalized, at least there were some records of the tradition. Yet, it is important to consider the lack of records on the *Endechas*. Given that women's history, and especially ritual leadership outside the synagogue for life events was often overlooked by historians, it is surprising that there are details of this custom at all. Ethnomusicologists have been more likely to offer some details of the practice, and Diaz-Mas and Weich-Shahak's reports of diaspora Sephardic communities are extremely helpful for comparing Sendrey's detailed descriptions from rabbinic and Sephardic sources. There would of course be differences in practice per community and historic period of performance. That is very notable in the differences in custom with Gamliel's report of modern Yemenite women's wailing traditions. What all relate though is helpful in examining information available from the medieval Spanish Jewish community. In contrast, it is disturbing to see little or no mention of the *Endechas* in Ashtor's historical account of the Muslim period, Dobrinsky's description of diaspora Sephardic communities, or even Shiloh's overview of women's traditions. Though he does mention the lament tradition, most of what he writes concerns Ashkenazi women, where the keening practices of Jewish women were strong in the Sephardic community. Current scholarship seems to focus on women's lament tradition in the biblical period, and there are numerous new articles on the subject. But there is still a dearth of research of the medieval period.

My final point is the comparison in historical records on Muslim and Christian death dance practices with that of the Jewish *Endechas*. It is very clear that the Jewish women's tradition was respected within the Sephardic community. Halevi points out that this is a contrast with the Muslim community, who had an almost paradoxical appreciation for the custom within various communities, while officially banning the practice. It is not that all Islamic jurists opposed the keening women, and Halevi even offers more moderate positions of the Shi'ah community, and several examples of the popularity of the practice in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East.⁷⁵

As Ahmed relates to us though, even when the tradition seemed to be very popular in medieval Egypt, there is an attempt by officials to kill the custom. The

75 Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 133, 137–138.

fear seemed to be that this was too pagan a practice, and that the Christian community perhaps shared this fear. Baer mentions that it is Jewish women who are hired to lead Christian funerals in keening, and later reports show that there is a concern in the Christian hierarchy of this and other dance practices. In sum, the difference from Judaism is amazing. This hardly means Jews were more feminist-friendly, but at least in medieval Spain and many diaspora Sephardic communities, women were recognized for their leadership in this particular and important life-cycle ritual.

Conclusion

Jewish women were valued as lament leaders in medieval Spain, definitely in the Christian period, and perhaps in the Muslim period as well. The practice has a long history in the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world, though it was not a timeless and never-changing tradition. No doubt there were variations in practices from those regulated by the rabbis of the Talmud, to the description from medieval records, to the reports of Sephardic communities mentioned in the writings of Sendrey, Dias-Mas, and Alvar. Basic forms of lament leadership in wailing and movement seem remarkably similar, especially the stamping feet and clapping hands. Yet more importantly, the work of these women appears to have been respected by the Jewish community, at least to some degree.

Overall, historical records reveal that Judaism does not formally have as much an issue with dance and expressive movement as does Christianity and Islam.⁷⁶ Perhaps the reason for the popularity of the Jewish *Endechas* was simply the fact that they were available, respected for the ritual leadership they provided within the Jewish community. Though rabbis regulated the custom, it is never condemned, as seen in Islamic ruling. Neither is the custom dismissed as merely superstitious pagan practice, which appears to be the issue with some Christian graveyard dances.

The importance of the *Endechas* may be easy to overlook. In a post-Enlightenment society often far removed from death and funeral customs, much less wailing, it may be difficult for modern scholars to understand this performance tradition as significant. It is embodied and expressive, not necessarily dealing with words of a formal lament, but a choreographed set of movements. While historians recovering women's history sometimes give significance to women who could read and write, the assumption seems to be that current standards are pertinent for the past. Since women did, overall, have less access to formal education, it is important to consider the role of their activities in religious life as a whole. In a medieval world, far more familiar with death, especially during periods of plague, the existence of ritual lament leaders may have played a far more significant role than we might imagine.

76 see Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Traditions*, 209–221; Judith Ingber, *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011).

Performance and ritual studies are providing new understanding of why and how the *Endecha* tradition was important for a grieving community. We so often remove death from life, and even limit grieving rituals to less dramatic practices than keening, or simply ignore or eliminate embodied grieving gestures, even hesitating to cry. Yet within the community of the medieval world, dancing for death seemed not only appropriate and customary, but a necessary ritual.

5

WILLS AND TESTAMENTS

Francine Michaud

“It is customary for men to make their testaments when they die, and for them to have a funeral on the day they have been buried” (John Wyclif).¹ Wills and testaments belong to those rare documents produced in the Middle Ages that allow for a direct entry, across the social spectrum, into the mindset of individuals determined to ready themselves for their very own finality on earth.² In the context of Latin Christendom, that also meant hoping to set the course of one’s fate in the afterlife with all its implied eschatological uncertainties. The medieval will-maker urgently prepared for death owing to a general warning repeatedly reminded to the faithful, that “although nothing is surer than death, nothing is less sure than its hour,” an ancient injunction borrowed from the hugely popular *Life of Saint Antony* written by Athanasius at the end of the fourth century.³ In Christian tradition, spiritual salvation required propitiatory actions aimed to redeem a life of sin. While, throughout the medieval period and beyond, works of mercy, prayers, and masses – the conventional *pro anima* (for the soul) gifts – were deemed the most efficacious

- 1 “Comune custume of men is to make þer testament whanne þei dien, and for to make exequies for þat day þat þei been biried,” Sermon ccxxxvii, in *Select English Works of John Wyclif*, ed. T. Arnold (Oxford, 1869–71), vol. 2, 212, cited in Michael M. Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England: From the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to the End of the Thirteenth Century* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), 195.
- 2 If, in England, the formal understanding of a “will” is an instrument that allowed for the conveyance of landed property while chattels were transmitted by “testament,” in this chapter the terms are interchangeable, largely because “in practice people might deal with real and movable property in one document, a last will and testament,” Clive Burgess, “Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered,” in *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Late Medieval England*, ed. Michael Hicks (Gloucester, UK: Allan Sutton, 1990), 30.
- 3 Paul-Albert Février, “La mort chrétienne,” in *Segni e riti nella chiesa altomedievale occidentale, 11–17 aprile 1985* (Spoleto: Presso La Sede del Centro, 1987), vol. 2, 883–84.

means to both memorialize and save the sinner's soul, he or she required the assistance of the living, foremost the family members and the clergy. Monica, Saint Augustine's mother, stated it succinctly: "this only I request, that you would remember me at the Lord's altar, wherever you be."⁴ In the course of time, wills and testaments became the individual's privileged means to see intercession carried out and secure a place in the heavenly hereafter.

Given the cultural context into which medieval will-making evolved from its origins in early Christianity to the eve of the Reformation, testamentary acts were born to intricate religious and secular considerations that cannot be easily disentangled within a twenty-first-century cultural perspective. This is all the more problematic because, as legal conduits between the living and the dead, they were meant to ensure the social and economic reproduction of families, and henceforth, society at large. Perhaps foremost, religious legacy and its effects were deemed to be perennial, and, hardly a metaphor in this context, a matter of life and death. In the awaiting of the Last Judgment, anxiety toward the certainty and unpredictability of death instilled a familiar and widespread fear paramount throughout the Middle Ages. Most Christians could hardly ignore the necessity to prepare for death, that is, for their "spiritual health" with their goods returned to God in anticipation of the afterlife.⁵

From the Mediterranean to the Northern regions of Latin Christendom, whether they lived in urban or rural communities, countless thousands of medieval testators have left their traces in the historical record.⁶ European archival repositories are replete with last disposition acts in various forms that were either enrolled at secular or ecclesiastical courts, or recorded by the hand of a public notary. While the academic interest in medieval wills and testaments is more than a century old,⁷ their systematic treatment with regards to a cultural analysis of the afterlife in history owes itself to cultural historians over the last four decades.⁸ The voluminous historiography

4 Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, IX, XI, 27, trans. Edward Bouverie Pusey (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1992), 215.

5 Paraphrased statement from Marie Narrette's will in 1405, cited in Martha Howell, "Fixing Movables: Gifts by Testament in Late Medieval Douai," *Past and Present* 150 (1996): 3.

6 For instance, in England, A. J. Camp, *Wills and their Whereabouts* (Bridge Place UK: Phillimore & Co. Ltd, 1963); in Provence, Jacques Chiffolleau, "Les testaments provençaux et comtadins à la fin du Moyen Âge: Richesse documentaire et problèmes d'exploitation," *Sources of Social History: Private Acts of the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Paolo Brezzi and Egmont Lee (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 131–52; in Italy, Martin Bertram, "'Renaissance Mentality' in Italian Testaments?" *The Journal of Modern History*, 67.2 (1995): 368.

7 Legal specialists were among the pioneers to shed light on this medieval source, such as Henri Auffroy, *Évolution du testament en France des origines au XIII^e siècle* (Paris: Arthur Rousseau, 1899); for England's early edited collections, see *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock (Holmes Beach, FL: Wm. W. Gaunt & Sons, Inc., 1986. First published in 1930 by Cambridge).

8 Such as Michel Vovelle who, in the 1970s, investigated the process of de-Christianization in pre-revolutionary France through the quantitative study of wills. See his *Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIII^e siècle: Les attitudes devant la mort d'après les clauses des testaments* (Paris: Seuil, 1973). Since then, however, his methods and approach have been adapted and revisited by medievalists.

on testamentary practice in the medieval period provides ample evidence of the riches testaments yield to our knowledge and understanding of how medieval men and women came to terms with their earthly mortality and life in the hereafter. By reason of space, this chapter seeks to capture the common experience during the millennium that spread from the end of the Roman Empire to the Reformation in Western Europe, with a special focus on the testamentary practice of the laity.

In keeping with the central theme of this book, the present chapter addresses the spiritual concerns of will-makers and, especially, the purpose of the *pro anima* dispositions they left to posterity. In the Middle Ages, the *pro anima* bequest provided a common way for contemporaries to express attitudes toward death and what they imagined, over time, as the most expedient provisions to be made to ease their passage into the next world and secure an everlasting life with the Lord. To be sure, these dispositions could be merely standardized or truly individualized. Furthermore, because both the kindred and the Church exerted in medieval society relative control over its members, the weight of family interests and clerical influence necessarily calls into question individual “agency” in testamentary practice, a matter we will return to shortly.

After all, a will was only its maker’s hope or intention, an afterlife project – albeit a very public one – that could be contested by the living.⁹ All the while, it was at once a testimony and a didactic model of both personal faith and the proper manner of dying. Indeed, a will was an act performed mostly at home where the testator was preparing to die before his family members, natural witnesses of his last wishes.¹⁰ Supreme among them were the *pro anima* bequests. Of course, testaments were only one means to transfer property to ensure a proper death; donations such

9 D. H. Hazeltine, “Comments on the Writings Known as Anglo-Saxon Wills,” preface to *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, xi. Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England*, 185, 288. Michel Petitjean, “L’acte à cause de mort dans la France coutumière du Moyen Âge à l’époque moderne,” in *Actes à cause de mort: Deuxième partie. Europe médiévale et moderne. Acts of last will: Second part. Medieval and Modern Europe*, coll. Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin pour l’histoire comparative des institutions. Transactions of the Jean Bodin Society for Comparative Institutional History, 60 (Bruxelles: De Boeck University, 1993), 94. Wills were at times nullified for failing to respect customary laws of succession which, in many regions, overrode individuals’ last wishes: Robert Boutruche, “Aux origines d’une crise nobiliaire: Donations pieuses et pratiques successorales en Bordelais du XIIIe au XVIe siècle,” *Annales d’histoire sociale* 3/4 (1939): 170. They might also be circumvented, resisted, or outright ignored by heirs: Thomas Kuehn, *Heirs, Kin, and Creditors in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 12. Kuehn also warns that unclear intentions were open to interpretation, hence wills were susceptible to be “thwarted.” See his review of Steven Epstein’s, *Wills and Wealth in Medieval Genoa, 1150–1250* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1984), in *Speculum* 61 (1986): 253–55. That many a testator used, beyond the formal narrative conventions, spiritual invectives and legal retribution against heirs and executors expresses doubt about the will’s implementation and enforcement. But as Sheehan argues, this is also why “the old notions regarding the publicity of a donation remained strong”; *The Will in Medieval England*, 178.

10 Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England*, 116. According to Jacques Chiffolleau, the dissociation between death and will-making occurred only in the fifteenth century; *La comptabilité de l’au-delà: Les hommes, la mort et la religion dans la région d’Avignon à la fin du Moyen Âge (vers 1320 – vers 1480)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1980), 78–79, 83.

as alms were likely made at various stages in one's lifetime, or a chantry established in a pre-mortem agreement. This truism serves as a reminder that testamentary bequests do not reveal the extent of the donor's material sacrifice from the bulk of his or her wealth,¹¹ and at best offer an obtuse "key hole" to peer into will-makers' spiritual orientation.¹² Furthermore, while surviving wills are only a fraction of the mass really produced, they were more likely to have been recorded and preserved if they proceeded from religiously motivated testators who donated valued goods – such as land – hence the over-representation of the elite classes in these acts. Even when they become more bountiful from the twelfth century onwards, cutting across the social spectrum, they prove unevenly spread and studied across Europe.¹³ Perhaps more importantly, not everyone made wills, and not only by reason of legal capacity: an unknowable number of individuals, although they could have made a will, died intestate either by choice or circumstances.¹⁴

Finally, last but not least of all limitations imputed to the use of wills in historical investigations, is the doubt cast by the formulaic structure of the document coined in a language that the vast majority of testators did not master, Latin.¹⁵ Then the larger issue becomes that of "voice," a concern symbolically displayed by the third person the scribal hand very often used to draw an utterly personal act. However, to be valid, last wills needed to be made orally¹⁶ – a sheer necessity in a vastly illiterate society – before a set number of instrumental witnesses chosen by the testator. In addition to the weight of legal forms, customs, and habits, a host of

11 Testators almost never itemized their estate in their wills. If institutionalized in England, inventories are seldom found elsewhere; Chiffolleau, "Les testaments," 139. Qualitative methods can only serve to underscore trends given the uncertainties of bequests themselves, because neither bulk provisions nor monetized bequests to an unspecified number of recipients can be counted; Bertram, "'Renaissance Mentality,'" 362; see also Shona Kelly Wray and Roisin Cossar, "Wills as Primary Sources," in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources. Using Historical Sources to Discover Medieval Europe*, ed. Joel Rosenthal (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012), 61.

12 Burgess, "Late Medieval Wills," 30.

13 Bertram, "'Renaissance Mentality,'" 368.

14 Jacques Poumarède, "Le testament en France dans les pays de droit écrit du Moyen Âge à l'époque moderne," in *Actes à cause de mort*, 135. Wills also left out the young and healthy who accidentally died prematurely; see Kuehn, *Heirs, Kin, and Creditors*, 12–13. Furthermore, individuals' lack of, or limited number of, children might have stimulated testamentary practice. Wendy Davies notes the correlation in tenth-century Northern Spain in "Buying with masses: 'Donation' *pro remedio anime* in Tenth-Century Galicia and Castile-Leon," in *Sauver son âme*, 406. See also the studies conducted in Lyon, Arles, and Valréas up until the mid-fifteenth century, cited in Chiffolleau, "Les testaments," 138.

15 With the exception of Anglo-Saxon, also used to draft wills in early medieval England; see Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England*, 55.

16 "Even in the later part of that epoch (...) they [writings] were required to be both heard and seen before they were accorded a legal efficacy"; Hazeltine, "Comments on the Writings," xl. In England, for instance, late medieval justices understood that a testament was the written form, and only the testimonial, of an oral will; see Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England*, 47. In France, the written form became mandatory only in the sixteenth century; see Auguste Dumas, "Testament," *Dictionnaire de Droit canonique* 7 (1965): 1198.

imponderable pressures admittedly affected individual volition during the dictation of a will. But it is also noteworthy that because of the public character of a deathbed act made in the presence of one's social entourage (family, spouse, relatives, authority figures, clerics, business partners, neighbors, etc.), codicils or the right to revoke a will provided additional tools to affirm individual choices.¹⁷ For the vast majority, the testamentary act represented the only moment of freedom – especially for women whose capacity and “voice” were much more reduced in medieval culture – to dispose of their goods with their mind set on the afterlife.¹⁸

The Merovingian era to the twelfth-century shift

The most common form of testaments in the Middle Ages was the nuncupative (oral) will.¹⁹ Not only was the orality of will-making the chief legal principle that governed its practice in medieval society, it also accounted for its “democratization.”²⁰ Its principle was well accepted by both the Church and the state as a testament soon became equated with an instrument of spiritual salvation.²¹ But in order to permanently bear evidence to a testator's intentions, the Church advocated quite early for a written instrument produced under the seal of an authority figure (ecclesiastical or lay). This concern grew particularly urgent when the testament had become an act *pro anima* in preparation for death and – one hoped – for eternal life.²²

17 Despite the weight of custom on the decision regarding funerals, pious donations, even the choice of heirs, Chiffolleau insists on the agency of will-makers; “Les testaments,” 149, and *La comptabilité*, 84; so does Epstein, *Wills and Wealth*, 34, 198–200. In support of this position, see the convincing method used by Kathryn Reyerson in her analysis of female wills at Montpellier, “Wills of Spouses in Montpellier before 1350: A Case Study of Gender in Testamentary Practice,” in *“For the Salvation of my Soul”: Women and Wills in Medieval and Early Modern France*, ed. Joëlle Rollo-Koster and Kathryn Reyerson (St Andrews, UK: University of St Andrews, 2012), 44–60; see also in the same volume of essays, Rollo-Koster's, “Item Lego... Item Volo... Is there really an ‘I’ in Medieval Provençales’ Wills,” 8–9.

18 Hazeltine, xxx. On women's testamentary freedom, see Katherine J. Lewis, “Women, Testamentary Discourse, and Life-Writing in Later Medieval England,” in *Medieval Women and the Law*, ed. N.J. Menuge (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2000), 57–76.

19 There were other less common forms known in the period: the solemn testament – or mystic – published after the testator's death, the olographic – written and signed by the testator's hand – which appeared toward the end of the period (and evidently presupposed literacy), and the public will, or Roman, which reappeared in certain localities also at the end of the period, such as in Lyons; see Marie-Thérèse Lorcin, *“D’Abord il dit et ordonna...” : Testaments et sociétés en Lyonnais et Forez à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Lyon: Presses de l'Université de Lyon, 2007), 19. Yet, even in Roman-law countries, the nuncupative will retained its strength; see Poumarède, “Le testament en France,” 144. In Provence, it persisted until the eighteenth century: see Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 40.

20 An observation noted by Chiffolleau for the late thirteenth century in relation to “notarial consumerism” (“Les testaments,” 148), although it should apply to a much earlier period, especially in Italy; see Epstein, *Wills and Wealth*.

21 The shared jurisdiction of will-making between Church and state in medieval society, with a distinctive shift in favor of the former, belongs to cultural history with the advance of Christianity: Dumas, “Testament,” 1193.

22 Petitjean, “L’acte à cause de mort dans la France coutumière,” 92.

Since early Christianity, the Church had focused on the accumulation of the celestial treasury as a means of eternal salvation, whether through testamentary or simple donation.²³ Arguably, the continued practice of the testament in the early period, concurrently with the rising popularity of donations *pro anima*, attests to the progressive and successful reception of the Christian message of salvation inherited from the patristic era.²⁴ Following the Old Testament's association between generous gift-giving and a state of perfection, Pope Gregory the Great's insistence on almsgiving was transmitted in the penitential literature and quickly penetrated the newly converted peoples' cultural system: the commutation of penance – derived from the tariffs of composition inherent to old Germanic law – could be vicariously performed by spouses or parents to seek remission of sins for eternal salvation, an idea unknown in Antiquity.²⁵ After all, the original meaning of viaticum adapted to Christian faith was that which was taken for the last pilgrimage – a moment ideally preceded by the administration of last rites in the presence of a priest – to atone for one's sins and avoid eternal punishment. A sacrificial gift was then expected from the sinner to relieve the poor and support the Church in return for spiritual benefits (through prayers and masses), while both the act and the object of giving had intrinsic value.²⁶ Although the faithful were reminded to prepare daily for death, because of the penitential quality of the last rites, alms donation came to be closely associated with the testament.²⁷ Hence the act's formal organization acquired two complementary, hierarchical functions, with the spiritual leading the profane. This was a medieval originality reflecting the profound Christianization of will-making.²⁸ While a gift (from modest alms to religious foundations) established a reciprocal partnership with the Church and the poor – the testator's main beneficiaries – to secure propitiatory suffrages for the soul, the act itself reminisced the Eucharistic sacrifice, bearer of salvation.²⁹ Not surprisingly, communion came

23 According to Matthew, 6, 19–21, cited in Eliana Magnani, “Du don aux églises au don pour le salut de l’âme en Occident (IVe–XIe siècle): Le paradigme eucharistique,” *Bulletin du centre d’études médiévales d’Auxerre* 2 (2008): 22, accessed August 3, 2015, doi:10.4000/cem.9932; see also Petitjean, “L’acte à cause de mort dans la France coutumière,” 112.

24 With the process of conversion, early medieval people in Western Europe became sensitive to the pressure exerted by the church through the writings of Saints Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, Isidore of Seville, and especially Gregory the Great's “Dialogues”; Février, “La mort chrétienne,” 933.

25 Février, “La mort chrétienne,” 936; C. M. Cappon, “Le testament dans l’évêché d’Utrecht,” in *Actes à cause de mort*, 154.

26 Barbara H. Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909–1049* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), 205; Février, “La mort chrétienne,” 885, 900, 933.

27 According to a sermon attributed to Saint Eligius (seventh century) cited in Février, “La mort chrétienne,” 942.

28 Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 77.

29 “It was a deep-seated Germanic idea that a gift required a counter-gift or counter-performance,” Hazeltine, xxv. The fact that several copies of testaments (chirographs) were produced corroborates the contractual notion of post-mortem donations; see Février, “La mort chrétienne,” 939. The pastoral of Christian charity inspired by Saint Paul (Ep. 5, 1, in Magnani, “Du don aux églises,” 3) set the foundations for the entire

to be associated with the necessary viaticum reserved to the dying before their final journey.

Originating in classical Roman law, the *testamentum*, a practice believed to reflect both personal wishes and character,³⁰ survived and remained vital after the collapse of the Empire in the West and the rise of the German successor states well until the ninth century.³¹ But, as noted, the testament's essential purpose shifted, while the Church played a pivotal role in its diffusion from early Christianity through the conversion period. Although unknown to the German settlers in the West,³² testaments were used by the Romanized population – foremost among ecclesiastical and secular elites – and, especially, in the Mediterranean regions such as Catalonia and Septimania.³³ However, since the essential mode of patrimonial alienation tolerated by the Germans was the *donatio inter vivos* (gift between the living), and given the legal “fragility” of the testament,³⁴ strategic means such as the *donatio pro anima* (gift for the soul) were devised to circumvent family resistance against last will dispositions, with a pre-mortem effect poised to benefit both testators and the Church.³⁵ Ironically, by encouraging the use of other legal tools to ease the transfer of the faithful's goods for their spiritual benefit, the Church itself had become “the tomb digger of the testament.”³⁶ Therefore, new cultural sensibilities had dictated the immediate and irrevocable implementation of the *pro anima* gift, an act whose

Middle Ages; see also on the Eucharistic meaning of the *pro anima* donations, Magnani, “Du don aux églises,” 1–2.

30 According to Pliny the Younger, “a will was a mirror of character”; Valerie Hope, *Roman Death: The Dying and the Dead in Ancient Rome* (London: Continuum, 2009), 30.

31 Josiane Barbier, “Testaments et pratique testamentaire dans le royaume franc (VIe–VIIIe siècles),” in *Sauver son âme et se perpétuer: Transmission du patrimoine et mémoire au Haut Moyen Âge*, ed. François Bougard, Cristina La Rocca, and Régine Le Jan (Rome: École française de Rome, 2005), 56.

32 Although, according to Tacitus, in German law family ruled inheritance principles and practice, nevertheless, through Christian influence, the Germans were quickly introduced to the testament in the post-invasion era: Auffroy, “Évolution du testament,” 133–37. However, among them already, a certain notion of ownership existed prior to the advance of Christianity for chattels were buried with the dead “for his future good”; Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England*, 7, and also 17–18, 24. On the notion of individualism in traditional German societies, see also Aron J. Gourevitch, *La naissance de l'individu dans l'Europe médiévale*, trans. Jean-Jacques Marie (Paris: Seuil, 1997).

33 For instance, an estimated 3,000 wills exist for Catalonia alone prior to 1200: Nathaniel L. Taylor, “Women and Wills: Sterility and Testacy in Catalonia in the eleventh and twelfth centuries,” *Medieval Encounters* 12:1 (2006): 92. For Languedoc, see Poumarède, “Le testament en France,” 131; also, Dumas, “Testament,” 1190.

34 Since a testament's execution had to be delayed until death (which could happen many years after its dictation), the goods promised may then no longer exist, hence compromising the spiritual benefits expected in return. As noted earlier, a testament could also be easily revoked, void, or met with the heirs' or executors' resistance, or royal interference in aristocratic families' patrimonial affairs: Barbier, “Testaments et pratique testamentaire,” 60.

35 The motivation behind this shift transpires clearly in contemporary documents; see for instance the act of donation made in 627 by a woman, Theodetredis, in favor of Saint Denis, cited in Barbier, “Testaments et pratique testamentaire,” 38, 48–49.

36 The expression belongs to Barbier, “Testaments et pratique testamentaire,” 61.

purpose in regards to Christian eschatology gained enormous importance in the Merovingian and the Carolingian periods.³⁷ While the *donatio pro anima* often assumed the same spiritual objectives as the classical *testamentum* in all but name,³⁸ it acquired a collective vocation unknown in traditional testamentary practice: the support and interested association of the donor's family in both the act of giving and the property "sacrificed" to the Church. In other words, all members could, in return, benefit from the clergy's intercessory prayers for their souls while keeping their memory alive in the community.³⁹

The consolidation of purgatory and testamentary practice

Between the ninth and the twelfth century, the *testamentum* receded in favor of hybrid forms of donations *pro anima*, triumphing in most parts of Latin Christendom during the feudal period.⁴⁰ With the culture of guilt in full swing in the Carolingian period, the corollary notions of justice, fairness, and hope paved the way toward a firmer conception of purgatory. Already Augustine had advanced a hierarchy of sinners: the good, the not so good, and the bad.⁴¹ The development of penitential spirituality, and the uncertainty around the redemptive efficacy of confession and penance due to sins, instilled the need of permanent and repeated prayers in preparation for the Last Judgment. Monastic institutions were to serve that very function.⁴² If praying for the departed was already incorporated in the mass by Augustine's time, the novelty was the introduction and intensification of votive masses for the dead which reached their full liturgical expression in the middle of the eleventh century with Cluny's commemoration of the Dead, celebrated on November 2.⁴³ By then, the *donatio pro anima* had transitioned

37 Magnani, "Du don aux églises." The *pro anima* donation was also used as a strategy to control its immediate execution especially when it implied a reservation of usufruct – and the added protection extended by the beneficiary, i.e., the church – a paramount necessity in the case of vulnerable donors such as widows: Janet L. Nelson, "The Wary Widow," in *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 95.

38 Dumas, "Testament," 1190. In Northern Spain, where the testament continued on occasion to be used, it often assumed the content rather than the form of a *stricto sensu* testament; Davies, "Buying with Masses," 405.

39 For instance, between 909–1049, more than 3,000 donations inter-vivos were granted to Cluny: Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter*, 202–206.

40 Donations could be done with or without reservation of usufruct, and could take effect immediately or after death (*post obitum*), or a combination of the two.

41 Adriaan H. Bredero, "Le Moyen Âge et le Purgatoire," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 78:2 (1983): 435.

42 It is certainly the originality of the medieval culture to have transcended blood family structures and instead used a mediating institution – the Church – to honor the dead, whoever they might be: Michel Lauwers, *La mémoire des ancêtres, le souci des morts: Morts, rites et société au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1997), 328.

43 It occurred, not accidentally, the day after All Saints Day, a feast introduced by Pope Gregory I: Magnani, "Du don aux églises," 15.

toward the gift for cause of death (*donatio propter mortis*) and, ultimately, the nuncupative testament.⁴⁴

Testaments embraced larger considerations and the strategic ventilation of several pious gifts to ascertain the suffrages of a wide variety of beneficiaries, rather than a single transfer of real property, which was the chief purpose of a donation *pro anima mortis*. And because of their generic purpose, they broadened to people with limited access to land, the lower classes and women.⁴⁵ Notwithstanding age and mental incapacities,⁴⁶ for the first time in Western history, the testament was no longer the preserve of a male aristocratic elite, ecclesiastical or secular.⁴⁷ The resurgence of the testament occurred in the larger context of the twelfth-century cultural transformation that accelerated economic growth, urban expansion, and greater educational

44 For a very good discussion of the *pro anima* gift in testaments, see Christine Barralis, Corinne Marchal, and Anne Wagner, introduction to *Le testament spirituel, du Moyen Âge à l'époque moderne: Legs, salut de l'âme, miroir des vertus chrétiennes*, ed. Christine Barralis, Corinne Marchal, and Anne Wagner (Metz: Centre de recherche universitaire lorrain d'histoire, 2013), 7–19.

45 Even though until Gratian's *Decretum* serfs were considered incapable to make wills (Auffroy, *Évolution du testament*, 459–60; Dumas, 1194), with the renewal of town life and the franchise movement from the twelfth century onwards, a greater proportion of feudal dependants now had access to testamentary freedom among other liberties. In England, the multiplication of boroughs brought about this general trend: H. S. Bennett, *Life on the English Manor: A Study of Peasant Conditions, 1150–1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 248–51, 303. Although there was still considerable resistance from the manorial lords against the Church advocacy on behalf of the unfree's testamentary freedom, in practice, however, and under cultural pressure to extend the right to all to prepare for the unforeseeable death, estates increasingly allowed serfs to dispose of their chattels, and even land: Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England*, 229, 233, 254. A few testaments dictated by serfs appear in manorial records at the turn of the fourteenth century; some are published in Ada E. Levett, *Studies in Manorial History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938; repr., Merlin Press: London, 1963), 224–34. Taylor, "Women and Wills," 93; see also, Jean-François Poudret, "Le testament dans les pays romands de la Renaissance du droit romain aux codifications cantonales (XIIIe–XIXe s.)," in *Actes à cause de mort*, 11.

46 The *alieni juris* (individuals under the authority of another person) were deemed legally incapable to make wills, such as slaves, children (boys under 14 and girls under 12), and the mentally inept: Auffroy, *Évolution du testament*, 98–101. If in Roman-law countries paternal authority precluded children of any age to make wills, they could instead make a *donatio propter mortis* with their father's consent, unless they had been properly emancipated, not an uncommon occurrence in certain areas, such as Avignon: Chiffolleau *La comptabilité*, 134.

47 Certainly in Ancient Rome, the use of testament "characterized an educated, propertied, and largely male minority," Hope, *Roman Death*, 27. But recent historiography, despite scanty evidence (evidently the written records would have privileged substantial donations that only the wealthy and powerful could procure), has challenged the notion that in the early Middle Ages will-making was exclusively the privilege of an elite; on this point, see Roland Ganghofer, "L'acte à cause de mort en Alsace au Moyen Âge," in *Actes à cause de mort*, 135; François Bougard, conclusion to *Sauver son âme*, 493; and also, in the same collection, Barbier, 29. At any rate, in early eleventh-century Catalonia, serfs were known to make wills: Taylor, "Women and Wills," 87–96. Taylor's article is particularly interesting for it sheds light on abusive feudal customs in respect to lords' inheritance claim on their childless dependants.

opportunities, and in turn, the recognition of individual will in legal acts.⁴⁸ Greater means led to wider lay participation in religious life which, of course, required tighter pastoral supervision, but also adaptation to pressing spiritual needs at a time of heretical fear.⁴⁹ The church's predication campaign in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with a sharper focus on purgatorial redemption, stimulated the "democratization" of will-making in fundamental ways, for securing the afterlife had remained at the core of the faithful's eschatological concerns across society.⁵⁰

With the twelfth- and thirteenth-century advance of written culture – which the proliferation of notarial series and testamentary rolls amply demonstrates – urban and rural parishioners took the habit of leaving their last wishes in documentary form, a trend further propelled in the fourteenth century by the advent of the Black Death.⁵¹ Regardless of some limitations placed in certain regions on the capacity of wives to make wills, women's unprecedented involvement in testamentary acts attests to the vast popularity of wills among the laity in the last centuries of the Middle Ages, especially in some Mediterranean regions where they often accounted for more than half of the testators.⁵² Recognized in many cultures throughout history, women's "special" relationship with the sacred and death may explain why, from very early on, they acted as agents of conveyance of pious gifts.⁵³ Widows, daughters, or sisters were thus mandated by testamentary dispositions to provide for the salvation of their kin and husbands.⁵⁴ Although it remains

48 C. M. Cappon, "Le testament dans l'évêché d'Utrecht," 156. But it might be hasty to claim that when it became largely practiced in the later Middle Ages, the testament served increasingly and essentially profane objectives (Jacques Poumarède, "Le testament en France," 139). In fact, it may as easily be argued, to the contrary, that will-making owed its popularity not only to bourgeois and urban cultures sheltered from feudal influence and family patrimonial interests, but also to the intense spiritual revival that characterized the period: André Vauchez, *Les laïcs au Moyen Âge: Pratiques et expériences religieuses* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1987). On the Mendicant influence on confession, will-making, and spiritual bequests: Francine Michaud, "Le pauvre transformé: Les hommes, les femmes et la charité à Marseille du XIII^e siècle jusqu'à la Peste noire," *Revue historique* 650 (2009): 243–90.

49 Vauchez, *Les laïcs au Moyen Âge*.

50 Carolingian theologians, as well as the earliest donors to Cluny, had long recognized the benefit of a divine fire apt to purify the dead; Bredero, "Le Moyen Âge et le Purgatoire," 449–51.

51 Chiffolleau, "Les testaments provençaux," 54–55, 134. Exposed earlier to the twelfth-century renaissance of Roman law, southern regions from Italy to Languedoc first experienced wider testamentary practice. However, the movement soon spread quickly to the northern regions. See Poudret, "Le testament dans les pays romands," 68; Ganghofer, "L'acte à cause de mort en Alsace," 144–46; Petitjean, "L'acte à cause de mort dans la France coutumière," 99.

52 On this point, see Francine Michaud, "Family Emotional Outlets? Women's Wills in Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Marseille," in *Women and Wills*, 25–43.

53 With anthropologists, sociologists, and ethnologists, historians have long pondered the association between women and the cult of family memory: Emmanuelle Santinelli, "Les femmes et la mémoire: Le rôle des comtesses dans la France occidentale du XI^e siècle," in *Sauver son âme*, 459–60.

54 As inheritors charged to bequeath property on behalf of family members, women were seen as trustworthy channels for religious patronage: Julia Crick, "Women, Posthumous

speculative to ascertain solid gender divisions toward sensitivity to death in will-making,⁵⁵ women seemed to have been particularly receptive to Mendicant evangelical spirituality;⁵⁶ arguably freer from patrimonial consideration, they may have attached more meaning to concrete, charitable giving than men.⁵⁷

The very old notion of the “portion of the dead”⁵⁸ set apart from one’s estate for spiritual salvation remained constant throughout the period, although a testator’s specific bequests may have varied according to customs, wealth, status, but also personal inclination.⁵⁹ More importantly, across time and place, testators

Benefaction, and Family Strategy in Pre-Conquest England,” *The Journal of British Studies* 38:4 (1999): 399–422. Similarly, in Germany, Flanders, and France, Carolingian aristocratic women arranged for the *memoria* (prayers for the dead) not only for the benefit of their kin and conjugal family, but their husbands’ ancestors as well; accordingly, they conveyed properties along family institutional provenance (for instance, dowry goods for their own kin, dower goods for their husbands), most certainly with their respective members’ consent; Santinelli, “Les femmes et la mémoire,” 459–70. In the same collection, see a more moderate interpretation of the role of women in memorialization in tenth-century Northern Spain, where “more men than women were associated with donation for the purpose of commemoration, at the rate of about two to one”: Wendy Davies, “Buying with Masses,” 410 (for copious references to recent literature on women, the sacred, and memory in the early Middle Ages) and 416. See also Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England*, 67.

55 Boutruche had already perceived, without developing further, a gender difference in testamentary practice; “Aux origines d’une crise nobiliaire,” 163.

56 A special “friendship” that did not escape later satirists, such as Chaucer. On female testators’ close association to the friars, in particular the Franciscans; see Equip Broida, “Actitudes religiosas de las mujeres medievales ante la muerte (los testamentos de Barcelonesas de los siglos XIV y XV),” *Las mujeres en el cristianismo medieval: imágenes teóricas y cauces de actuación religiosa*, ed. Angela Muñoz Fernández (Madrid: Laya, 1989) 467; Francine Michaud, “Liaisons particulières? Franciscains et testatrices à Marseille, 1248–1320,” *Annales du Midi* 104 (1992): 7–18; Reyerson, “Wills of Spouses in Montpellier.” More broadly, testamentary evidence also shows an inclination for women to “bequeath” spiritual values as active members of the militant Church: Francine Michaud, “De père en fils? Sensibilité spirituelle à travers les testaments marseillais, 1248–1350,” in *Le testament spirituel*, 21–33.

57 For a general observation, see Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 220. Broida specifically argues, though, that women may have been more inclined to give to charity because they were socialized to assist, in their daily lives, the poor and the sick, the true face of Christ; Broida, “Actitudes religiosas de las mujeres medievales,” 475. But for a conspicuous differential attitude toward charity among women themselves, see Michaud, “Le pauvre transformé.”

58 Augustine advised that the share of a testator’s child should be left to Jesus-Christ, that is, to the poor that are His living limbs and the Church, its mystical spouse (cited in Auffroy, *Évolution du testament*, 123). It is only in 1215, at the fourth Lateran Council, that the “good custom” (*laudabilis consuetudo*), i.e., a payment for burial services, was made mandatory to compensate for the unbeneficed clergy’s work; but for fear of simony (trade of sacraments and church services), the specific exaction was left to custom until the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century: Antoine Bernard, *La sépulture en droit canonique, du décret de Gratien au Concile de Trente* (Paris: Loviton, 1933), 141–52.

59 The distribution of alms to the poor, requests for prayers, and masses for the soul were enduring means of intercession cherished throughout the centuries. Bede, for instance, opted for these very forms in his will (Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England*, 283). The

focused primarily on burial and mourning rituals that traditionally maintained the connections between the living and the dead, while allowing for a gradual process of separation, usually within a full year.⁶⁰ Even though the presence of a saint buried in a local sanctuary prompted the faithful to elect their sepulcher in the graveyard or – if they had the means or power – in the church proper,⁶¹ the vast majority of will-makers were concerned to lay with their ancestors in the parish graveyard to await the Last Judgment.⁶² Keen to recommend their souls to God, the Virgin, and the celestial court, will-makers might also have expressed a particular devotion for a patron saint to whom candles, prayers, masses, and even pilgrimages were promised.⁶³ Despite the universal belief in the resurrection of the flesh at the end of time, bodies – soon put down into the ground – were to be disposed of without much specification except for the occasional mention of the shroud for the funeral procession. The cortège itself seldom led to specific testamentary requirements either, as it was implicitly left to the family's discretion or confraternities;⁶⁴ however, many a late medieval will-maker insisted on the presence of priests and the poor at the time of burial, the perennial symbol of salutary intercession.⁶⁵ Throughout the entire period under study, the poor (individualized, anonymous,

same holds true for the testaments of Anspertus and Andreas, archbishops of Milan at the time of Charles the Bald: Jean-Charles Picard, *Le souvenir des évêques: Sépultures, listes épiscopales et culte des évêques en Italie du Nord des origines au Xe siècle* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1988), 95–96. The faithful of the later Middle Ages preserved these perennial habits, even though some further developments characterized certain urban elites in the post-plague years; see Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 289ff.; Samuel K. Cohn Jr., *The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death: Six Renaissance Cities in Central Italy* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 160–61, 281.

60 Marie-Thérèse Lorcin, “Le temps chez les humbles: passé, présent et futur dans les testaments foréziens (1300–1450),” *Revue historique* 566 (1988): 330–32; also, Robert Dinn, “Death and Rebirth in Late Medieval Bury St Edmunds,” in *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100–1600*, ed. Steven Bassett (Leicester, London, and New York: Leicester University Press, 1992), 165.

61 This trend, however, only appeared in the Carolingian period, not before: Jill Harries, “Death and the Dead in the Late Roman West,” in *Death in Towns*, 56–67. Furthermore, the rich could opt to have their body divided and dispersed among several cultic spaces, as king Richard I of England did; Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England*, 258.

62 Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 165–77; Vanessa Harding, “Burial Choice and Burial Location in Later Medieval London,” *Death in Towns*, 122–23. In major urban centers at the end of the Middle Ages though, testators also wished to be buried with their spouses. For instance in northern Italian cities see, Samuel K. Cohn Jr., *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe* (London: Arnold, 2002), 246; in Marseille, Michaud, “Family Emotional Outlets,” 39; in Avignon, Chiffolleau: *La comptabilité*, 192; and London, Harding, “Burial Choice,” 127.

63 Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 358–89.

64 Notably after the demographic onslaught of the Black Death, religious guilds acted as surrogate families: Noël Coulet, “Jalons pour une histoire religieuse d’Aix au Bas-Moyen Âge,” *Provence historique* 22:89 (1972), 228–29; Dinn, “Death and Rebirth,” 158, 165.

65 Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 133–49, and, from the same author, “Pratiques funéraires et images de la mort à Marseille, en Avignon et dans le Comtat Venaissin (vers 1280 – vers 1350),” *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 13 (1976): 278–79; Dinn, “Death and Rebirth,” 156.

marriageable girls, sick, or orphans) remained the privileged recipients of testamentary bequests for the soul in return for prayers.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, parish churches and cathedrals received the will-makers' benefactions essentially in support of the clergy and their communities mandated to officiate post-mortem liturgical celebrations.⁶⁷ Prayers, the old antidote against the fear of the demons' power over the soul, were certainly expected of family members, funeral participants, and other testamentary beneficiaries.⁶⁸

But among the liturgical celebrations, masses to commemorate the dead and assist in the purification of the soul (that of the deceased, but also the departed's spouse, children, and parents) were far more commonly stated in wills. They were to be celebrated repeatedly at specific times, generally within the full year following the testator's death, from the burial day ("cantar" or *requiem*) to the end-of-the-year anniversary mass ("obit").⁶⁹ With the intensification of pastoral teaching on purgatory at the turn of the fourteenth century, permanent and cumulative masses increased and their chronology spread over many years (although rarely beyond the span of a generation, i.e., thirty years). The more elaborate testamentary dispositions may well have been more reflective of personal choices.⁷⁰ But because of the permanent – and costly – endowment these provisions often entailed,⁷¹ this development was most noticeable in the wills of wealthier, mostly urban

66 Although efforts to rationalize resources into institutional charities were poised to attract testamentary bequests in larger urban societies, especially after the Black Death. See Samuel Cohn, "Piété et oeuvres d'art," *Annales. Histoire, Science Sociales*, 51:3 (1996) 553; Marie-Simone de Nuce de Lamothe, "Les diverses formes de charité à Toulouse d'après les testaments," *Assistance et charité, Cahier de Fanjeaux* 13 (1995), 172–73, the poor still typically received money, clothes, or food (bread, wine, pork, etc.), and were sometimes invited to participate in funeral feasts; see Epstein, *Wills and Wealth*, 183; Dinn, "Death and Rebirth," 157; and Chiffolleau, "Pratiques funéraires," 278–79.

67 This was the case in Strasburg, from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, where the bourgeois pro-actively campaigned to entice their fellow-citizens to sponsor the construction and maintenance costs of the cathedral, by showing them the blueprints of the sculpture program for the central nave and the belfry: Ganghofer, "L'acte à cause de mort en Alsace," 151–52.

68 Février, "La mort chrétienne," 901; Dinn, "Death and Rebirth," 157–58.

69 This performance calendar for the commemoration of the dead found its source in ancient medical culture: it was held that although the corpse started to corrupt on the third day after death, it dissolved completely upon the ninth, except for the heart which disappeared only on the fortieth day: Février, "La mort chrétienne," 890. According to regional customs, mass celebrations in the Middle Ages might take place on the seventh (e.g., England) or the ninth day (Provence); but more universally, they were celebrated on the thirtieth day, a vivid and enduring legacy of Pope Gregory I's "trental." Originally, a trental was celebrated after thirty days, according to Gregory's *Dialogues*, but it yielded to the repetition of thirty low masses after the thirtieth day of death; Février, "La mort chrétienne," 906.

70 And "a weakening of customary restraints"; Dinn, "Death and Rebirth," 165. On the cumulative trends – and the mathematical accounting of the afterlife – see Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 289, 326–53.

71 The spiritual preparation of the afterlife by permanent and commemorative anniversaries contributed to the extinction of certain lineages, well into the end of the Middle Ages: Boutruche, "Aux origines d'une crise nobiliaire."

parishioners.⁷² At any rate, the spectacular expansion of chantries beyond the aristocratic elites after the Black Death evinces the greater value placed on the power of the Eucharistic devotion in intercessory practices, while affirming its role as a firm anchor for permanent remembrance of the testators and their families.⁷³

Conclusion

The study of will-making thus shows a remarkable continuity during the Middle Ages as an individual's end-of-life means to prepare for the Last Judgment.⁷⁴ Permeated with sensibilities toward death, medieval wills evoked a need to balance fear and hope through familiar rituals so as to come to terms with one's death and that of one's close ones in this world, and foremost, to ensure their eternal life in the next.⁷⁵ In the course of the period, though, the consolidation and internalization of the belief in purgatory further eased eschatological anxieties through traditional means – alms, prayers, and masses – in redemption and commemoration of the departed soul, through the family's and the community's suffrages.

But the real novelty was the reappearance and democratization of testamentary practice, which both revealed and stimulated the steady emancipation of individuals from the weight of the family and, paradoxically, that of the Church.⁷⁶ While the Church, wary of uncontrolled expressions of spirituality (associated in many instances with “heretical” behavior), imposed imitation models of Christian perfection, it had always promoted the individualization of faith.⁷⁷ This came into fruition in the context of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, admittedly an unprecedented “golden age” for the laity.⁷⁸

72 Marie-Claude Mirandet, *Le souci de l'au-delà: La pratique testamentaire dans la région toulousaine 1300–1450*, (Perpignan: Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 1998), 2 vols.

73 Février, “La mort chrétienne,” 914.

74 Longer and more stylistic preambles, or greater attention given to funeral preparations in late medieval testaments did not change the fundamental and long-standing attitudes toward death; Bougard, conclusion, 491.

75 Février, “La mort chrétienne,” 889 and 933; Mirandet, *Le souci de l'au-delà*, vol. 1, 289.

76 Yet, in more rural, customary countries, such as Sweden or even the Netherlands, family input was still required in the fifteenth century (for instance at Limburg, Namur, and Liège): Ditley Tamm, “Testaments and Other Dispositions mortis causa,” 12–13; and Philippe Godding, “L'acte à cause de mort dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux (XIe–XVIIIe s.),” *Actes à cause de mort*, 171–72. It seldom happens even near large urban communities, such as Marseille, where peasants of surrounding villages evoked in their testaments the consent of descendants; Francine Michaud, “Individu, patrimoine et tensions intergénérationnelles dans les testaments médiévaux: Le cas de Marseille (1248–1348),” in *La parenté déchirée: Les luttes intrafamiliales au Moyen Âge*, ed. Martin Aurell (Leiden: Brepols, 2010), 115. In the aristocracy, the kin maintained its hold in testamentary dispositions in the later centuries of the Middle Ages, often in imitation of dynastic (royal or princely) reverence for ancestors; Sabine Berger, “Le testament spirituel des conseillers du roi de France (1270–1328): Entre volonté de représentation sociale et recherche du salut,” *Le testament spirituel*, 223–24.

77 Gourevitch, *La naissance de l'individu*, 28, 298.

78 André Vauchez, *Les laïcs au Moyen Âge*.

To be sure, the belief in purgatory was put into greater focus under clerical influence.⁷⁹ And the faithful responded in kind, for wills concurrently started to spread by leaps and bounds, especially among burghers who did not hesitate to solicit the assistance of priests to act as confessors and testamentary executors.⁸⁰ All the same, clerical culture had to adapt to lay sensitivities, which magnified in the wake of the Black Death (1348–1350) and its recurrences until the end of the Middle Ages. For instance, the testamentary evidence points to a greater proclivity for the suffrages of popular saints, old or new (the Virgin, Saints Anthony, Sebastian, Catherine, etc.), to appeal for God's mercy and, especially, a much greater demand for clerical services, foremost the celebration of masses at the altar for the soul, hence the surge in chantry foundations.⁸¹ But the latter remained a luxury only the rich could afford. Incidentally, it was also among an elite that the more spectacular, "flamboyant" emotions toward death were expressed in testamentary dispositions with a heightened taste for the macabre (such as the material corruption of the body), which progressively became represented in mortuary arts, paintings, sculptures, and monuments.⁸² Although the commemoration of the "self" found expression in

79 For instance, in 1328 Montpellier, will-makers Johanna Mercaderii and her husband Guillelmus Saligani left money to the ladies in charge of a collect for the souls of purgatory; Reyerson, "Wills of spouses," 53–54. While the first mention of purgatory dates from 1333 in the papal city of Avignon (Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 408–409), the notion did not appear at all in many regions, especially in rural communities where there was little transition between one year and perpetuity: Lorcin, "Le temps chez les humbles," 330–32; also see Mirandet, "Le souci de l'au-delà," vol. 1, 263–89. Synodical statutes incited the faithful to distribute their wealth to atone for their sins by way of testamentary dispositions; Dumas, "Testament," 1193. Didactic literature (e.g., sermons and *exempla*), particularly following in the post-Lateran Council (1215), repeated the necessity to make wills in the presence of clergy. See for instance the early *exempla* of Caesar of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*; A. Hilka, *Die Wundergeschichten des Caesar von Heisterbach* (Bonn: 1892), vol. 1; Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 75–76. In an *exemplum* from a collection written by a late thirteenth-century friar from Marseille, a family man is reminded to save a share of his estate for his "soul," as one of his own children, a clear reference to Augustine's admonition; J. Th. Welter, "Un recueil d'*exempla* du XIIIe siècle," *Études franciscaines* (1914) (*exemplum* no 221, 315, cited in Chiffolleau, 75). However, on the limits of clerical influence and the pagan survivals in late medieval peasant testaments in the south west of France, see Mirandet, "Le souci de l'au-delà," vol. 2, 561.

80 The right to entrust a spiritual confessor to execute bequests of alms only known to them under the seal of confession, and kept undisclosed to the will-makers' entourage, was a prerogative increasingly manifest from the thirteenth century onwards. This speaks volumes of the testators' determination to resist external pressure and have their personal wishes come true; see Sheehan *The Will in Medieval England*, 179; Godding, "L'acte à cause de mort dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux," 163; Michaud, "Le pauvre transformé," 258–68.

81 The universal appeal of James of Voragine's *Golden Legend* (late thirteenth century) arguably paved the way for the later centuries' cult of saints; Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 358–89. See also Diana Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in the Medieval West* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999).

82 Cohn, *The Black Death Reconsidered*, 243–52. For the development of the "flamboyant" death between 1360–1420, see Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 282ff. The Avignon model, bound to be more greatly moulded by the clergy in the papal city, found a limited echo

late medieval wills as a form of social representation, singularized by narcissism and individual hubris in the case of the wealthy,⁸³ they more broadly reflected a Christian pilgrim's spiritual concerns for the afterlife.⁸⁴

Indeed, the popularity of testamentary practice in the later Middle Ages, regardless of class, status, or gender, cannot be understood without the realization that society wholeheartedly embraced the quasi sacramental value of a dying man or woman's last words, essentially couched in a model of piety in which they found inspiration.⁸⁵ Bequests translated a larger – and more individualized – investment in religious life, the most significant being the number, choice, and specifics of masses.⁸⁶ As wills bear witness, if the clergy came to play a more active role in the preparation of death, it was because the Church adapted to the demands of the laity in liturgical services. In other words, the priests were sought after less for their intrinsic spiritual value than for the ritualistic and symbolic functions they performed by virtue of their office.⁸⁷ Hence, it can be argued that wills and testaments contributed to, as much as they revealed, the greater appropriation, rather than adoption, of clerical culture by the laity in the closing centuries of the Middle Ages.

elsewhere during the period; Mirandet, "Le souci de l'au-delà," vol. 2, 561; Lorcin, "D'Abord il dit et ordonna," 167–68.

- 83 Cohn, *The Black Death Reconsidered*; see Bertram who, in opposition to Cohn's thesis, contends that testators started to display "hubris" before the Black Death; "'Renaissance Mentality,'" 362–64.
- 84 While individual ostentation may have marked worldly achievements among the powerful, aristocrats, and prosperous merchants, it cannot be dissociated from the quest for salvation. See for instance the case of Enguerran de Marigny, chamberlain of King Philip the Fair: Berger, "Le testament spirituel des conseillers du roi," 211–28.
- 85 Barralis, Marchal, and Wagner, introduction, 18.
- 86 Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 213, 343; Epstein, *Wills and Wealth*, 161.
- 87 Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité*, 246–47, 266–87; Clive Burgess, "London Parishioners in Times of Change: St Andrew Hubbard, Eastcheap, c. 1450–1570," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53:1 (2002): 59.

6

SPECTACULAR DEATH: CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH TOWNS

James Davis

A hanged or decapitated man, a disemboweled and dismembered body, or a burned heretic are all evocative images associated with medieval capital punishment. Modern sensibilities tend toward a notion that such executions were brutal and brutalizing. Spectators reveled in suffering, thus demonstrating an “otherness” in the premodern mentality that placed little value on human life. Richard van Dülmen entitled his book on early modern punishment *Theatre of Horror*, a phrase that invoked Michel Foucault’s view on pre-Enlightenment punishment.¹ However, this impression of retributive cruelty as a spectacle not only conflates the chronology of punishment rituals, but also neglects fundamental notions of morality, religion, justice, and authority that underpinned medieval attitudes toward the death penalty. Most importantly, there was a strong ritualistic aspect to the event that highlighted common messages about the body, the soul, and purgatory. The visceral sufferings of the condemned were not just about a public exertion of legitimate violence by the crown, or an exercise in retributive justice, but were also embedded in strongly felt conceptions regarding spiritual salvation.

Much of the historical scholarship on medieval capital punishment has focused on Continental examples, with notable works for France, the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy.² Comparatively, less has been written about the English experience

- 1 Richard van Dülmen, *Theatre of Horror: Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Germany*, trans. Elisabeth Neu (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 32–4; Pieter Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering. Executions and the Evolution of Repression: From Preindustrial Metropolis to the European Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities 1300–1348* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 269.
- 2 Esther Cohen, *The Crossroads of Justice: Law and Culture in Late Medieval France* (Leiden: Brill, 1993); Paul Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done: The Age of Spectacular Capital Punishment in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Spierenburg, *Spectacle*; Dülmen, *Theatre*;

beyond execution as part of substantive law, though recent works by Katherine Royer and Danielle Westerhof have significantly bolstered the historiography.³ Royer and Westerhof both concentrated on the chronicle accounts of higher-status traitors, highlighting the political contexts for their mutilating deaths. By contrast, this chapter provides an overview of execution rituals and specifically how they were staged and viewed within towns, where many such punishments took place.⁴ The available evidence is not as fulsome as that used in other European studies, but a picture can be still drawn of practices that were broadly comparable, even if they lacked the level of spectacle and formality that had developed in France and Italy. The fundamental issues remain the same. Was a medieval execution ritual primarily a demonstration of authority, intending to deter further crime and maintain social order, or should it be viewed more in terms of retributive justice or even as a path to redemption for the condemned? The rituals, location, and form of capital punishment can thus tell us much about the motivations of the authorities and spectators, as well as broader attitudes toward death.

In the eleventh to twelfth centuries, a shift in legal thought had occurred from viewing crime as primarily a tort to an individual to a conception where the communal peace was also affected. This meant that crime could not be expiated only by customary reparation, but also required cleansing punishment in order to heal the community and deter further harm.⁵ As the concept of felony developed, encompassing murder, burglary, robbery, rape, and arson, death was the only possible sentence.⁶ In England, there were a number of authorities that claimed the right to inflict capital punishment.⁷ Some lords exercised the traditional privilege of *infangtheof* well into the thirteenth century, which allowed them to execute

Nicholas Terpstra, ed., *The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy* (Kirkville, Miss.: Truman State University Press, 2008).

- 3 Katherine Royer, "The Body in Parts: Reading the Execution Ritual in Late Medieval England," *Historical Reflections* 29 (2003): 319–39; Katherine Royer, *The English Execution Narrative, 1200–1700* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014); Danielle M. Westerhof, "Deconstructing Identities on the Scaffold: The Execution of Hugh Despenser the Younger, 1326," *Journal of Medieval History* 33 (2007): 87–106; Danielle M. Westerhof, "Amputating the Traitor: Healing the Social Body in Public Executions for Treason in Late Medieval England," in *The Ends of the Body: Identity and Community in Medieval Culture*, ed. Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Jill Ross (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 177–92.
- 4 See also: Peter Fleming, "Processing Power: Performance, Politics, and Place in Early Tudor Bristol," in *Personalities and Perspectives of Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. A. Compton Reeves (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012), 141–69.
- 5 Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*, 43–4; *Medieval Italy: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Christopher Kleinhenz (New York: Routledge, 2004), vol. 1, 269–70.
- 6 John G. Bellamy, *The Criminal Trial in Later Medieval England: Felony before the Courts from Edward I to the Sixteenth Century* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), 8, 138.
- 7 Henry Summerson, "Attitudes to Capital Punishment in England, 1200–1350," in *Thirteenth Century England VIII*, ed. Michael Prestwich, Richard Britnell and Robin Frame (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001), 123.

someone for manifest, red-handed larceny.⁸ Urban charters and customs might permit civic authorities to execute felons under their own jurisdiction, such as the 1373 charter of Bristol.⁹ However, the prime jurisdiction over felons lay with royal courts. The gaol delivery sessions, held at a circuit of towns by royal justices, were a prominent English law process that might lead to the execution of a felon, but it was the local urban gallows that would be used to carry out the sentence.¹⁰

There is little evidence that medieval people were openly critical of capital punishment, but there was a tacit consensus that it should be reserved for the worst offenders: the manifest and the recidivist. The fifteenth-century customs of Lydd noted that cutpurses should lose their ears for their first two offences, and only “be he jugged to deth” at the third.¹¹ Medieval English juries were generally reticent to send someone to the gallows and, if they convicted the offender at all, the evidence was often manipulated to avoid a verdict of manifest felony.¹² For instance, petty larceny was for thefts worth below 12d and juries attempted to ensure this valuation was not frequently breached.¹³ In gaol deliveries, only about 10–30 percent of felony cases resulted in conviction, and even fewer were executed. By comparison, the treason conviction rate was closer to 90 percent. It should also be noted that “status determined punishment as well as conviction” and the poor and strangers were more likely to be hanged than better-off and neighbors.¹⁴ In most reasonably sized English towns there were only a handful of executions a year.¹⁵ Even in London, it may have been a ritual that remained potent because it was not inflicted on a large scale, except at times of political crisis. The Westminster chronicler suggested that people were shocked by the number of gibbeted bodies left exposed after the 1381 revolt.¹⁶ There is little sense here that people had become desensitized to such brutal acts.

The means of execution was important, whether by hanging, beheading, burning, or another more “spectacular” form. The method was symbolically connected to

8 J. B. Post, “Local Jurisdictions and Judgment of Death in Later Medieval England,” *Criminal Justice History* 4 (1983), 8; Bellamy, *Criminal Trial*, 70; *Crime, Law and Society in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Anthony Musson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 17.

9 Fleming, “Processing Power,” 147. See also: Helen Carrel, “The Ideology of Punishment in Late Medieval English Towns,” *Social History* 34 (2009), 303.

10 Bellamy, *Criminal Trial*, 154. Other sentences of capital punishment were issued by the King’s Bench, commissions of trailbaston and, less frequently, general eyres.

11 *Fifth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (1876), vol. 1, 530.

12 James Buchanan Given, *Society and Homicide in Thirteenth-Century England* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977), 96; Summerson, “Attitudes,” 125–6.

13 Hanawalt, *Crime*, 57–61; John G. Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in England in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 156–60.

14 Hanawalt, *Crime*, 53–4, 269; Trevor Dean, *Crime in Medieval Europe 1200–1550* (Harlow: Pearson, 2001), 125; Spierenburg, *Spectacle*, 153–65; Fleming, “Processing Power,” 149.

15 Dean, *Crime*, 128–9 argues the same for most medium-sized towns of northern Europe.

16 *The Westminster Chronicle 1381–1394*, ed. and trans. L. C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 14–15.

the crime, but also to the social status of the condemned. Hanging was the most common form of execution in late medieval England, while beheading was usually reserved for those of higher social status. There was a notable exemplar in decapitation that would have been recognizable to the victim and audience – John the Baptist.¹⁷ This was linked to a tendency to view some executions in imitation of the suffering of martyrs, alongside chronicle narratives that sympathized with the accused and often delved into martyrdom rhetoric. For example, Richard Scrope, archbishop of York, was depicted as dignified, composed, and gallant at his execution in 1405.¹⁸ Those who were hanged received no such panegyric, since this fate was resoundingly considered degrading and humiliating. Matthew Paris referred to the gallows as “the cross of thieves,” while Roger Mortimer was shamed by being executed in 1330 on “the common gallows for thieves” at Tyburn.¹⁹

From the thirteenth century, traitors, rebels, and conspirators might face the more visceral punishment of being drawn, hanged, disemboweled, and quartered for their crime of damaging the political and social harmony of the realm. This was certainly no martyr’s or knightly death and it was fully intended to be dishonorable and publicly humiliating, as well as painful. Westerhof notes that only five men underwent this full process between 1272 and 1330: Dafydd ap Gruffydd (1283), William Wallace (1305), Gilbert de Middleton (1317/18), Andrew Harclay (1323), and Hugh Despenser the Younger (1326), with five others who incurred variations on this theme.²⁰ They faced a process that was more elaborate than most other forms of execution and deliberately emphasized their separation from the crowd and thus their permanent expulsion from the Christian community. It was an aggravated execution ritual designed to degrade utterly the individual, “to deprive him of public identity and his personal honor,” and highlight how the honor of the king or lord had been damaged by their treason. New men such as Harclay and Despenser appear to have been particular victims of noble vitriol.²¹ According to

17 Kathleen Falvey, “Scaffold and Stage: Comforting Rituals and Dramatic Traditions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy,” in *The Art of Executing Well*, ed. Terpstra, 16.

18 Alicia Marchant, “Narratives of Death and Emotional Affect in Late Medieval Chronicles,” *Parergon*, 31 (2014): 94–5. See also: *The Chronicle of Lanercost 1272–1346*, ed. and trans. Herbert Maxwell (Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1913), 245.

19 *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani Chronica Majora*, ed. Henry R. Luard (London: Longman), vol. 3, 498; *Adae Murimuth Continuatio Chronicarum*, ed. Edward M. Thompson (London: HMSO, 1889), 62; *Galfridi Le Baker de Swinbroke, Chronicon Angliae Temporibus Edwardi II et Edwardi III*, ed. John A. Giles (London: Jacobum Bohn, 1847), 112. For felonies, women could be hanged as well as men; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1258–66* (London: HMSO, 1891–1916), 342; *Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London*, ed. John G. Nichols (London: Camden Society, 1852), 31.

20 Westerhof, “Deconstructing,” 101; *Annales Monastici*, ed. Henry R. Luard (London: Longman, 1864–9), vol. 3, “Annales Prioratus de Dunstaplia,” 293–4; *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II: Annales Londonienses and Annales Paulini*, ed. William Stubbs (London: Longman, 1882), vol. 1, 139–42, 319–20; *Flores Historiarum*, ed. Henry R. Luard, 3 vols (London: HMSO, 1890), vol. 3, 124; *Select Cases before the Court of the King’s Bench under Edward II*, ed. George O. Sayles (London: Selden Society, 1957), vol. 4, 78.

21 Westerhof, “Deconstructing,” 89–93.

the *Brut*, Anthony de Lucy ridiculed Harclay just before his death with the words “you are not a knight, but a knave.”²²

Drawing involved dragging the criminal by the tails of horses from the gaol to the site of execution. It was intended to be degrading and tortuous. Without an animal skin or hurdle to protect them, the condemned might be dragged to their deaths before they even reached the gallows. This was the fate of a number of Norwich citizens in 1272 after a dispute with the prior led to the king demanding justice in a group spectacle.²³ At the gallows traitors would be hanged until unconscious, before being disemboweled. The removal of entrails and organs was a powerful symbol of treachery, reinforced by the destruction of their innards in fire. As the sentence against Gilbert de Middleton in 1317/18 stated: “Because the heart and other entrails of Gilbert have furnished him with the presumptuousness to think out such horrible felonies ... to be practiced against God and Holy Church and the king, his liege-lord, let his heart and entrails be [burnt] together under the gallows.”²⁴ There was a discourse in this period that your innards were connected to reason and loyalty, and that their corruption could lead to sinful thoughts. For this reason, William Wallace’s heart and intestines were burnt to ashes, and Hugh Despenser’s heart was similarly immolated.²⁵ The final stage of a traitor’s death was to be beheaded, removing rank as well as life, and many were then dismembered. Each stage emphasized a different crime that was being brought to the attention of the crowd.²⁶

Capital punishments imposed by the English royal government were seemingly more stable in their form, if not their detail, than those exhibited on the Continent, where we see a more regular use of stoning, boiling, burial alive, starvation in cages, and the deployment of the wheel to break a criminal.²⁷ Paul Friedland argued that in France we see “a dramatic increase in the severity and spectacularity of punishments from the twelfth through the sixteenth century.”²⁸ Burning was sometimes used in England. After the issuing of *De Heretico Comburendo* (1401) heretics could be burned in England, and this was also the traditional punishment for women who maliciously killed their husbands. In 1390, the landlord of the Cock in Cheapside, London, was murdered by his three servants, who were drawn and hanged at Tyburn, and his wife, who was burnt for ordinary treason.²⁹ Burning

22 Westerhof, “Deconstructing,” 103, cf. *The Brut, or, the Chronicles of England*, ed. Friedrich W. D. Brie, (London: Early English Text Society, 1906–8), vol. 1, 227.

23 *The Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds 1212–1301*, ed. Antonia Gransden (London: Nelson, 1964), 52; *Flores Historiarum*, vol. 3, 24–6; *Bartholomaei de Cotton, Monachi Nonvicensis, Historia Anglicana*, ed. Henry Richards Luard (Rolls Series, 16, London, 1859), 148.

24 *Select Cases*, 78; Westerhof, “Deconstructing,” 105.

25 *The Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II*, ed. Thomas Wright (London: Camden Society, 1839), 321–2; Westerhof, “Deconstructing,” 105.

26 Royer, “The Body,” 328–30.

27 Dean, *Crime*, 124; *Medieval Italy*, ed. Kleinhenz, 270.

28 Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*, 57.

29 *Grey Friars*, 7; *Crime*, ed. Musson, 95. The legal treatise, *Britton* (c.1280) differentiated between high treason, as attacks on the king and lords, and ordinary treason of betrayal, such as against husbands and masters; *Britton*, ed. Francis M. Nichols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1865), vol. 1, 40–2.

was viewed as a process of extreme purification, which in turn annihilated the body, and was reserved for crimes of heresy, sodomy, incest, sorcery, patricide, and infanticide.

A semblance of variety was also maintained in English urban customs, with which the king did not interfere as long as they had proof of continued use. Indeed, it is not certain that the more esoteric capital punishments outlined in customals were commonly carried out. The customs of Sandwich, recorded in the fifteenth century but probably older, declared that murderers should be buried alive at a place called “thiefdowns.”³⁰ In early fourteenth-century London, “a man convicted of treason in the court of the mayor was bound to a stake in the Thames during two flows and two ebbs of the tide.”³¹ Similarly in Fordwich, felons were to be drowned in the River Stour at a place called Thiefswell, and at Pevensey guilty men were taken to the town bridge at high tide and thrown into the harbor.³² It is noticeable that freemen of Pevensey were given the different punishment of hanging at the “Wahstrew” (felons tree), illustrating different attitudes toward criminals from within or without the community. Dover had the right to execute felons by throwing them off a cliff, and there is an example of such “infaliation” in the town in 1268–1269 when William de Portu was thus dispatched for murder.³³ These apparent differences in practice stem from attempts to assert a level of urban autonomy and authority, though the law concerning who should be executed was common and royal. During the reign of Edward IV, Hastings’ customs stated that they had once thrown felons off the cliff at Stortisdale, but now used “suche execucion as ys accordyng to the commune lawe of Inglonde as hangyng on galowes.”³⁴ Royal methods were thus becoming the standard. Indeed, in June 1390 the mayor of Dartmouth had to purchase a royal pardon for wrongly using burning as the execution method for Denys Beaumont.³⁵

One notable deviation was the instrument of execution recorded at Halifax by the mid-sixteenth century, which was akin to a type of guillotine: “The head blocke wherein the ax is fastened dooth fall downe with such a violence that if the necke of the transgressor were so big as that of a bull it should be cut in sunder at a stroke and roll from the leadie by an huge distance.”³⁶ In order to emphasize the crime in a visual manner, those who had stolen an animal might find the animal attached to the retaining pin of the axe so that the blow fell when the beast moved. Such a theatrical element to punishments was also evoked in the Waterford customs

30 *Borough Customs*, ed. Mary Bateson (London: Selden Society, 1904–6), vol. 1, 74.

31 *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis: Liber Albus, Liber Customarum, et Liber Hom*, ed. Henry T. Riley (London: Longman, 1859–62), vol. 1, 150.

32 *Borough Customs*, vol. 1, 75–7.

33 *Borough Customs*, vol. 1, 76; *The London Eyre of 1276*, ed. Martin Weinbaum (London: London Record Society, 1976), 54–5.

34 *Borough Customs*, vol. 1, 76.

35 *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1388–92*, 253.

36 *Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London: J. Johnson, 1807–8), vol. 1, 312.

of c.1300, where arsonists faced burning and thieving millers were expected to be hanged from the main beam in their mill.³⁷

A common theme pursued by historians is that capital punishment was intended to serve as a public deterrent to potential malefactors, since humans would rationally seek to avoid pain and infamy. Many studies have been influenced by the ideas of Michel Foucault, outlined in his seminal work *Discipline and Punish*, that spectacular punishment was intended to deter others from crime and reinforce the authority of those carrying out the sentence.³⁸ Executions were thus primarily a means to instill terror, prevent emulation of crime, and support secular authority. If authorities intended capital punishment as a means of deterrence to onlookers, then it would emphasize the particular crime, highlight the pain of the death, and remove such malefactors from the community. Repetition and symbolism in the ritual was important for its perceived legitimacy and permanency, as was an orderly, even dignified execution. Stage-management of these affairs was probably stronger in the sixteenth century, but there are glimpses in late medieval England of prepared routes and performative elements.

Consequently, many elements of the execution ritual could be read as a public manifestation and legitimization of power, particularly royal authority. As both Pieter Spierenburg and Susan Amussen have highlighted, capital punishment reinforced the government's right to exert violence as a legitimate disciplinary device.³⁹ When the 1381 rebels beheaded royal officials and exposed their heads at public places, they were attempting to appropriate this legitimacy. However, Foucault also questioned whether audiences necessarily perceived the execution as "an exercise in terror" and if the crowd could appropriate the symbolism and coded messages.

For some, the ritual may have been essentially punitive, to give satisfaction that a crime was equitably punished. Biblical sanction was derived from Exodus (21:23–35) that called for "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound," thus emphasizing the need for proportionality between the crime and punishment. Retribution was probably most important for victims or their families and friends rather than the authorities. Nevertheless, punishment perhaps reaffirmed social norms and prevented vendettas. Esther Cohen looked at how capital punishment helped define the boundaries of the normative community. In her work on late medieval France, Cohen emphasized the expressions of political authority and exclusionary elements within the execution rituals, and how the condemned individual was symbolically suppressed, shamed, and cast out.

However, Cohen also highlighted the growing potential offered to the criminals for spiritual reincorporation, with the ritual simultaneously viewed as a penitential

37 *Borough Customs*, vol. 1, 74, 77.

38 Foucault, *Discipline*.

39 Susan D. Amussen, "Punishment, Discipline, and Power: The Social Meanings of Violence in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 34 (1995): 3–4; Spierenburg, *Spectacle*, 12–13, 77–8.

process.⁴⁰ Paul Friedland commented on the seemingly contradictory rituals that could be gleaned from a late medieval execution, which “combined elements of ostracism and expulsion with those of compassion and forgiveness, and, at least in the afterlife, a promise of reintegration.”⁴¹ It is the wrong question to ask if there was a tension between the secular and religious perception of the execution, for the two coalesced in the medieval mind. Spiritual redemption was not irreconcilable with temporal punishment, and contemporaries could interpret events in multiple ways.⁴² It is not even clear that those who staged executions and those who watched necessarily viewed them in the same way. Friedland argued that many attended “to witness an act of atonement and to take part in an act of collective healing” rather than to heed the warnings of power or to be entertained.⁴³

Historians have increasingly emphasized the redemptive element of public execution rituals.⁴⁴ In the Church’s teachings, grave sins required confession and appropriate punishment.⁴⁵ Later medieval piety was infused with purgatorial ideas of penitential suffering that would scourge the individual of sin and eventually lead to salvation. Such ideas were embedded in the Passion of Christ and its ritual recreation in late medieval English towns on the feast of Corpus Christi. Christ himself went through a process of public humiliation and flagellation on his way to death on Calvary as a common criminal; a fate which he accepted humbly, even as the crowd mocked him. Like the execution journey, the festival of Corpus Christi also passed through the streets in procession, and it reinforced ideas of the body social or religious in which each member would contribute according to their means and social status.⁴⁶ The harmony of the body was dependent upon all working without sin and to their best ability. A criminal might be conceived as a sore in that body, one who harmed the common good and needed to be expunged.⁴⁷ The execution rituals thus become a form of healing for the communal body, aiding social harmony. In such ways the body provided a rich resource of meaning

40 Cohen, *Crossroads*, 77–84; Esther Cohen, “Symbols of Culpability and the Universal Language of Justice: The Ritual of Public Executions in Late Medieval Europe,” *History of European Ideas* 11 (1989): 407, 413.

41 Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*, 101.

42 Edward Muir, “The Eye of the Procession: Ritual Ways of Seeing in the Renaissance,” in *Ceremonial Culture in Pre-Modern Europe*, ed. Nicholas Howe (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 131.

43 Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*, 91.

44 Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*, 12–13; Samuel Y. Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Prosecution during the Florentine Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 165–88.

45 Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 37.

46 Mervyn James, “Ritual, Drama and the Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town,” *Past & Present* 98 (1983): 3–29.

47 Westerhof, “Amputating,” 178–81; Guido Ruggiero, “Constructing Civic Morality, Deconstructing the Body: Civic Rituals of Punishment in Renaissance Venice,” in *Riti e rituali nelle società medievali*, eds Jacques Chiffolleau, Lauro Martines and Agostino Bagliani (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull’ Alto Medioevo, 1994), 182.

for medieval society, and the metaphor of the body social could be also translated onto the physical body of the malefactor, such as in the insults hurled upon the body through the process of drawing by a horse.⁴⁸ The Passion and Corpus Christi were such a dominant part of medieval English religion that it is easy to see why the execution procession might be viewed as *Imitatio Christi*. Even the worst sinners might be forgiven if they were truly repentant, just like one of the thieves beside Christ at the crucifixion.

Another strong theme in post-Black Death England was the notion of a “good death,” which might mirror that of Christ. This was exemplified in the ideology and literature called *Ars Moriendi* (The Art of Dying). Although this did not formally appear in English literature until the end of the fifteenth century, the composite religious ideology was already well in place. This included the conception of a final struggle for the soul at the moment of death, when the dying person might yield to the temptations of the devil: infidelity, despair, impatience, pride, and avarice.⁴⁹ The individual also had the opportunity to reform at the last moment, but needed to be shriven of his sins. Within this ideology, the execution perhaps served as a real-life, visceral *memento mori* (reminder of death) and the need to prepare well and repent for earthly sins.

The executed man had one advantage over others in that he knew his time of death and could prepare for it; a contrast to the widespread fear of sudden, unexpected death. Participants would have understood that an unshriven criminal faced damnation and an eternally restless soul,⁵⁰ thus adding another layer to the physical penalty. A condemned felon who played the role of the penitent may have thus aroused the sympathy of onlookers, even their prayers. It is unlikely that the crowd was passive, particularly given the emotions that the rituals were intended to elicit, so they might have encouraged the offender’s acquiescence in spiritual submission.⁵¹ He would be expected to confess his sins, commend his soul to God, and act in a humble manner. Indeed, the condemned were often dressed in sackcloth or pauper’s clothes, as well as being barefoot.⁵²

The religious dimension is strongly evident in Continental executions by the fifteenth century. In Italy there was a formalized process of comforting that aided the criminal through a journey of confession and penance toward salvation.⁵³ Confraternities of laymen offered support to the condemned in an attempt to elicit atonement but also to distract from the forthcoming penalty. They used *tavoletta*, a

48 Ruggiero, “Constructing,” 179–80.

49 Binski, *Medieval Death*, 33–47.

50 Cohen, *Crossroads*, 195.

51 Mitchell B. Merbeck, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London: Reaktion, 1999), see Chapter 4.

52 *Annales Paulini*, vol. 1, 321. Conversely in elite executions, the sackcloth might be inferred as a humiliating loss of status rather than a penitential act; Cohen, *Crossroads*, 186.

53 Nicholas Terpstra, “Introduction: The Other Side of the Scaffold,” in *The Art of Executing Well*, ed. Terpstra, 7–9; Molly Morrison, “St. Catherine of Siena and the Spectacle of Public Execution,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 16 (2013), 43–55; Edgerton, *Pictures*, 172–6; Falvey, “Scaffold,” 15–16.

devotional painting on a handled board held before one's face, for the prisoner to contemplate upon during the journey to the execution site.⁵⁴ The French developed the *amende honorable* by the fourteenth century, where the criminal would go through a specific process of confessing the crime and then begging forgiveness of God and the king.⁵⁵ They would walk bare-footed in only a shirt, with the rope round their neck, and then perform a ritual of contrition at the entrance to a church while holding a cross or lighted taper. In Paris, by 1500, it was customary to stop in front of the convent of Filles-Dieu on the rue Saint-Denis, where the sentence would be read and the nuns provided a glass of wine, bread, and a crucifix.⁵⁶ This was not the Eucharist, but a passable imitation and provided an opportunity for a final confession.⁵⁷

It is likely that most English felons on their journey to death performed some public acts of contrition. Medieval towns were suffused with images of Christ, Mary, and the saints, produced by churches, friaries, guilds, and individuals. There were often shrines on street corners, so there were plenty of opportunities for intercession and contemplation. In the more detailed chronicle narratives there are some confessions of guilt, such as the thieves from within the king's household in 1255 who admitted their guilt but wanted to remind the king that they had not been paid their wages.⁵⁸ Other examples are more openly about confession in return for prayers for their souls, such as John Holland, earl of Huntingdon, in 1400, who wept as he confessed his sins to both God and king, and then begged forgiveness and intercession of all the commons.⁵⁹ The Earl of Arundel openly refused to confess his crimes, but a friar was made available for that very opportunity.⁶⁰ This option was also evident at more humble executions, for Cristina Cray made a confession to a Franciscan friar on her procession to the gallows in Hereford in c.1290.⁶¹ Indeed, the thirteenth-century treatise *La Court Baron* gives the final words for the bailiff after the death sentence as: "Take him away, and let him have a priest."⁶²

Some condemned men fully played their role of a penitent leading a ritual of atonement, or at least are represented this way by the chronicler. One example is Nicholas Brembre, mayor of London, during his execution in 1388:

54 Massimo Ferretti, "In Your Face: Paintings for the Condemned in Renaissance Italy," in *The Art of Executing Well*, ed. Terpstra, 79–97.

55 Cohen, *Crossroads*, 188; Esther Cohen, "'To Die a Criminal for the Public Good': The Execution Ritual in Late Medieval Paris," in *Law, Custom and the Social Fabric in Medieval Europe*, ed. Bernard S. Bachrach and David Nicholas (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990), 289; Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*, see chapter 4.

56 Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*, 102; Cohen, *Crossroads*, 201.

57 Falvey, "Scaffold," 18.

58 Bellamy, *Crime*, 44; *Matthaei Parisiensis*, vol. 5, 60.

59 Bellamy, *Crime*, 189; *Johannis de Trokelowe et Henrici de Blaneforde Chronica at Annales*, ed. Henry T. Riley (London: HMSO, 1865), 328–9.

60 *The St Albans Chronicle: The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, ed. John Taylor and Wendy R. Childs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002–11), vol. 2, 93.

61 *Acta Sanctorum* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 2002), Oct. I, 638, accessed September 1, 2015, <http://acta.chadwyck.com/>.

62 *The Court Baron*, ed. Frederick W. Maitland (London: Selden Society, 1890), 64.

As he was being drawn to the gallows he devoutly recited the Placebo and Dirige with the friars along the way and asked pardon of everyone; and thus with great contrition, brought his life to an end. Indeed, his contrition and piety moved almost all the bystanders to tears.⁶³

Another noticeable example of contrition was Thomas Usk in 1388 for treason, as described by the *Westminster Chronicle*:

who met his death with great contriteness of heart and supreme penitence, reciting with the utmost piety, as he was drawn to the gallows, the Placebo and Dirige, the Seven Penitential Psalms, the Te Deum, Nunc dimittis, Quicumque vult, and other hymns that bear upon devotion in the hour of death. His contrition was an example to others to amend their lives by drawing back from evil and turning forthwith to good.⁶⁴

Usk was a previous mayor of London and perhaps the chronicler was sympathetic to his fate during this time of political crisis, as well as his assertions of innocence. The account attempts to depict how a man of relatively high status would accept his fate and perform suitable acts of penitence. According to the chronicle, he also had to endure thirty strokes of the axe before he was decapitated, in the style of a martyr's death.⁶⁵

Thomas Usk also provides an unusual example from medieval England of a scaffold speech. Another was John of Powderham's confession.⁶⁶ Whether the more humble felon expressed such eloquence is doubtful, and the spectacle was likely pared back.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, there are hints that priests were made available for confession and the rituals themselves could elicit the prayers of onlookers. In most English towns outside London executions were probably infrequent enough to draw a crowd and meaning could be assembled from the procession even if the condemned remained silent. It is uncertain whether the lower classes were allowed to present gallows speeches, since it is only in the sixteenth century that printed pamphlet literature brought a voice to the common criminal. Indeed, there is little medieval English evidence that tells us consistently about the moments before the gallows journey, the size and response of the crowd, the dynamic of the procession, the behavior of the criminal, and scaffold speeches. However, this does not mean we should go as far as James Sharpe in dismissing the ceremonial of late medieval executions, even if there were innovations in the sixteenth century.⁶⁸

The medieval urban procession from gaol to gallows would have transformed the streets into a temporary theater space where rituals were enacted, sometimes in

63 *Westminster*, 314–5.

64 *Westminster*, 313–5.

65 Edgerton, *Pictures*, 126, 131.

66 *Lanercost*, 223.

67 Royer, *English Execution Narrative*, 55.

68 James A. Sharpe, *Judicial Punishment in England* (London: Faber, 1990), 32–4.

a dynamic manner. The route, symbols, and method of punishment all generated meaning, and audience participation “could strengthen social order and encourage obedience.”⁶⁹ Once sentence was passed, it appears to have been carried out swiftly, within hours or the day, with little room for any pardon. Reprieves were highly unusual and thus worthy of mention in the contemporary records.⁷⁰ A bell might signal the start of the procession, while the drawing of Hugh Despenser was accompanied by the sounds of horns and trumpets, partly to attract a crowd.⁷¹ However, we know little about the size of crowds for most executions, and it is possible that the humble felons who were strangers to the community died with only the hangman and court official as an audience. The main officer, such as the sheriff or urban bailiff, was expected to be present to ensure that the sentence was dutifully carried out.⁷²

The condemned criminal would be led from the prison or castle to the center of town for the public proclamation of the sentence and crime, and then through a town gate to the gallows. Peter Fleming notes that two rebels in Bristol in 1461 (Baldwin Fulford and John Heysaunte) were drawn on a hurdle from Newgate to the gallows *per medium eiusdem ville*, which was probably referring to the High Cross.⁷³ The encountered urban spaces referenced the main jurisdictional topography of the town, while also reinforcing the civic body politic by leading its citizens in procession and marking the spatial boundaries.⁷⁴

One of the most evocative accounts of a medieval English execution procession was that of Sir Thomas de Turberville, who was convicted of treason on October 6, 1295 for conspiring with the French and Scots:

He came from the Tower mounted on a wretched hackney, in a russet coat and with white shoes, and his head covered with a hood, and his feet tied under the horse's belly, and his hands before him; and round him were riding his torturers dressed like devils, and one held his rein and the hangman his halter, for the horse which carried him had both.⁷⁵

In this form, he was taken from the Tower of London to Westminster Hall, where his sentence was publicly pronounced by Sir Roger Brabazon, and then he was

69 Fleming, “Processing power,” 145, 165–6.

70 *Calendar of London Trailbaston Trials under Commissions of 1305 and 1306*, ed. Ralph B. Pugh (London: HMSO, 1975), nos. 87–8.

71 Westerhof, “Deconstructing,” 92; *Annales Paulini*, 320; *Chronique de Jean le Bel*, eds Jules Viard and Eugène Déprez (Paris: Renouard, 1904–5), 27. The instruments may have also provided a type of “rough music” that added to the carnivalesque quality of proceedings.

72 Bellamy, *Crime*, 187; Bellamy, *Criminal Trial*, 155; Dülmen, *Theatre*, 58.

73 Fleming, “Processing power,” 149.

74 Joëlle Rollo-Koster, “The Politics of Body Parts: Contested Topographies in Late-Medieval Avignon,” *Speculum* 78 (2003), 66–70.

75 *Bartholomaei*, 306, 439; *Anglo-Norman Political Songs*, ed. Isabel S. T. Aspin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), 49–55; *Croniques de London*, ed. George J. Aungier (London: Camden Society, 1844), 101–2.

dragged by horses on an ox hide through Cheapside to the Conduit, and then on to Tyburn where he was hanged. In contrast to Thomas Usk, the *Annales de Wigornia* noted that Thomas Turberville was specifically denied any potential devotion or pleas to God and the saints during his route to the gallows, implying that the dragging upon an ox hide was an intentional impediment to such spiritual succor.⁷⁶

There are few other indications in the English records of additional torture applied to the condemned *en route*, which sometimes appears in Italian and French accounts and has been viewed by historians as either further retributive punishment or part of the penitential process.⁷⁷ In 1306, Simon Fraser of Olivercastle suffered a very similar procession to Turberville, but without the accompanying devils.⁷⁸ Fraser was also made to wear a crown of periwinkle leaves, which was often used for wreaths. This may have brought to mind the Passion, but it is possible that this was more about chivalric shaming, such as when Despenser's arms were reversed or when the Earl of Carlisle was ceremonially stripped of his golden spurs and sword before being dragged through the streets.⁷⁹ There are legal hints that other exemplary punishments might take place just before execution. Felons who assaulted court officials might have their hand cut off, while rapists could potentially lose their eyes and genitalia. However, there is little to indicate that this happened much in practice in England by the end of the fourteenth century.⁸⁰

The gallows themselves were invariably situated beyond the town walls and in customary places, such as at a parish or county boundary (often marked with a cross), or at a crossroads or hill. Executions in new places were worthy of comment, such as in the *Westminster Chronicle* for the aftermath of the 1381 revolt, which stated that "gibbets rose where none had been before, since existing ones were too few for the bodies of the condemned."⁸¹ Originally, a stout tree sufficed, but they were usually replaced during the thirteenth century by scaffolds, such as a beam between two forked uprights which might carry several men at once.⁸² The most well-known execution site in England was the "Elms" at Tyburn, to the west of London's city walls, which was replaced with a strong gallows as early as 1220 upon the order of the king.⁸³ Beheadings, which were less common, might take place in the jurisdictional center of a town, such as Tower Hill in London.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the sites of execution were seemingly more stable in medieval

76 *Annales Monastici*, vol. 4, "Annales Prioratus de Wigornia," 522–3.

77 Morrison, "St. Catherine," 49; Esther Cohen, "Towards a History of European Physical Sensibility: Pain in the Later Middle Ages," *Science in Context* 8 (1995), 53–62.

78 *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. Rossell H. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 14–21.

79 Westerhof, "Deconstructing," 103; Royer, "The Body," 330.

80 Bellamy, *Criminal Trial*, 154; *The Treatise on the Laws and Customs of the Realm of England commonly called Glanvill*, ed. G. D. G. Hall (London: Nelson, 1965), 171, 177.

81 *Westminster*, 14–15.

82 Bellamy, *Crime*, 186.

83 *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum in Turri Londinensi Asservati*, ed. Thomas D. Hardy (London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1833–44), vol. 1, 419.

84 Cohen, *Crossroads*, 188–9; Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*, 102.

England than Esther Cohen discerned for Paris, where the authorities might variably choose to mutilate and execute at the site of the individual's crimes or other symbolic spaces – a graphic exemplum of retributive justice.⁸⁵

The medieval gallows was a prominent symbol of judicial authority, yet they were placed on what might be perceived as the margins of the community. These extramural, suburban sites have been described by historians as liminal places, where orderly society butted up against a disorderly exterior.⁸⁶ There are myriad English examples: St Michael's Hill was a suitable promontory near Bristol, while Harraby Hill was used outside Carlisle; Lincoln's gallows was at Canwick, south of the city; at Pevensey, criminals were hanged at the "Lowey" (probably the modern Pevensey Levels), which was outside the city but within the liberty; and at Rye, they were "hanged upon the salt marsh on the east side of the town, beyond the salt water of the town."⁸⁷ These places held symbolism for the expulsion of the criminal from the commonalty that they had disrupted. However, many had also been used from early medieval times for public assemblies, suitable for large crowds and a means of relocating possible disorder.⁸⁸ When placed on crossroads and boundaries, they were visible to visitors to the town, as well as to other jurisdictional authorities.⁸⁹ As with so many execution rituals, a multiplicity of associations and meanings could be adduced.

There was undoubtedly a gruesome dimension to the execution itself, and not just for those who faced a traitor's death. Hanging involved slow strangulation with the use of a slip-knot. The ladder, or sometimes cart, would be taken away swiftly, but there was no long drop to hasten death. Friends might be allowed to pull at the legs as a form of mercy.⁹⁰ William de Briouze described how William Cragh appeared after his hanging at Swansea on 27 November 1290:

His face was black and in parts bloody or stained with blood. His eyes had come out of their sockets and hung outside the eyelids and the sockets were filled with blood. His mouth, neck, and throat and the parts around them, and also his nostrils, were filled with blood, so that it was impossible in the natural course of things for him to breathe. His tongue hung out of his mouth, the length of a man's finger, and it was completely black and swollen and as thick with the blood sticking to it that it seemed the size of a man's two fists together.⁹¹

85 Cohen, "To Die," 287–8.

86 Ruggiero, "Constructing," 178; Joris Coolen, "Places of Justice and Awe: The Topography of Gibbets and Gallows in Medieval and Early Modern North-Western and Central Europe," *World Archaeology* 45 (2013), 764.

87 Fleming, "Processing power," 148–9; Summerson, "Attitudes," 126; *Borough Customs*, vol. 1, 75–6.

88 John Baker and Stuart Brookes, "Outside the Gate: Sub-Urban Legal Practices in Early Medieval England," *World Archaeology* 45 (2013), 752, 756–7.

89 Coolen, "Places," 762–3.

90 Bellamy, *Crime*, 187; Bellamy, *Criminal Trial*, 155.

91 *Acta Sanctorum*, Oct. I, 633–5. William Cragh (or Crak or ap Rhys) recovered after being taken down from the gallows, which the chronicler viewed as a miracle stemming

Some of the condemned perhaps struggled on the scaffold or rope, though there are surprisingly few medieval English examples of an execution that went awry in this fashion. In Continental descriptions, those who were unrepentant or disorderly at the gallows were seen as inspired by demons and might incur the wrath of the crowd.⁹² Again, we have few such narratives for medieval England. John Bromyard, an English Dominican friar writing at the start of the fifteenth century, commented that “thieves led to the gallows were apt to accept their fate with resignation” as though “these things were preordained for us.”⁹³ Thomas Smith reiterated such a view in 1583, “In no place shall you see malefactors goe more constantly, more assuredly, and with less lamentation to death than in England.”⁹⁴ These writers were employing the language of a good death, with the condemned playing the dutiful role of a humble, acceptant penitent; meritorious suffering had to be borne voluntarily.⁹⁵ However, precautions were also taken: the hands of the felon were tied behind their backs to prevent them trying to climb up the rope, and they were blindfolded, though this may have also been partly to protect the sensibilities of the crowd.

Professional executioners appear in England from the end of the fourteenth century, but not consistently across the country. In Nottingham, the gaoler’s tenement and oven were considered payment for services that included hangings.⁹⁶ Often it was still the accuser or the court official who had to undertake the execution, as noted in the fifteenth-century Dover customs for infalsation: “yf he be atteynte at the sute of the partye the appelour shall do execucioun, and if it be at the kyng’s sute the baylly shall doo it.”⁹⁷ Similarly, the customs of Romney (1498) stated that the successful appellant was responsible for finding a hangman or should do it himself.⁹⁸ As Henry Summerson has noted, not all proceedings went smoothly, with ladders and rope forgotten or the execution itself botched. In addition, not all executions were accepted by the crowd, and there were recorded attempts to rescue prisoners, often with clergy involved and an escape to the sanctuary of a church.⁹⁹ For instance, in 1317 in Fisherton (Wiltshire), John Tynhide was freed by a group of Dominicans while in procession to the gallows.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps there were doubts about the guilt of the condemned man or anxiety over the

from prayers to Thomas de Cantilupe, recently deceased bishop of Hereford; see Robert Bartlett, *The Hanged Man: A Story of Miracle, Memory, and Colonisation in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

92 Morrison, “St. Catherine,” 50–1; Merback, *The Thief*, 146–7.

93 Summerson, “Attitudes,” 133, cf. John Bromyard, *Summa Praedicatorum* (Nuremberg, 1485).

94 Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, ed. L. Alston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), 105.

95 Falvey, “Scaffold,” 15–16.

96 Summerson, “Attitudes,” 127.

97 *Borough Customs*, vol. 1, 76.

98 *Borough Customs*, vol. 1, 74.

99 Summerson, “Attitudes,” 126–9.

100 *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1317–21*, 69.

proportionality of the punishment. There were also notable cases where the hanged man was cut down prematurely and later revived. Walter Eghe was found guilty of stealing cloth in Norwich in 1285 and subsequently hanged, but he was found to still be alive while his body was being prepared for burial in St George's church. In such cases there was usually a popular conviction that the felon had been spared by God's intervention, and the king duly granted Eghe a royal pardon. However, Edward I also punished the city for failing to carry out capital punishment with due care.¹⁰¹ Similarly, in 1363, Walter Poynant was hanged at Leicester, but was revived and pardoned by Edward III, to whom the chronicler Henry Knighton assigned the words: "God gave you life and we shall give you a charter."¹⁰² However, when Adam Trop recovered from a hanging in Dublin in 1363, he was taken by officials and hanged again, this time successfully.¹⁰³

What happened to the body after the completion of the execution was integral to how the ritual as a whole was perceived. Indeed, the lack of burial in consecrated ground was considered as heinous a punishment as the execution itself, for it prevented the completion of a "good death," closed the potential path to eventual resurrection, and confirmed the permanent exclusion of the offender from the Christian community.¹⁰⁴ For the most notorious felons and traitors, their body would be left to hang on the gibbet as an example to others.¹⁰⁵ They thus remained outcast from the spiritual community as well as the temporal. This was the fate of Thomas Turberville, who was hanged in iron chains in order to hold the body together: "he will hang as long as anything of him can remain."¹⁰⁶ Thomas Walsingham described how the bodies of St Alban's rebels were left on the gibbet long after their execution in July 1381, and "were now oozing with decay, swarming with worms, were putrid and stinking, and exuding their foul odour upon them."¹⁰⁷

A political and geographical extension of such display was the post-mortem act of dismemberment. This was a common device for royal retribution at a time of political turbulence, at least from the reign of Henry III when the first English cases are reported.¹⁰⁸ One of the earliest examples was William de Marisco, who was drawn, hanged, disemboweled, and quartered in 1242 for his involvement in the

101 *Crime*, ed. Musson, 180–1, 5.13.

102 *Knighton's Chronicle, 1337–1396*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey H. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 188–91. Knighton refers to him as Walter Winkburn, but the royal letters of protection have survived and name him as Poynant of Hambledon; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1361–4*, 422; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1364–7*, 60–1.

103 *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1361–4*, 430.

104 *Medieval Italy*, ed. Kleinhenz, 270–1; Royer, *English Execution Narrative*, see Chapter 1. There was scriptural authority for not leaving bodies unburied; see Deuteronomy 21:23.

105 It is not clear whether the gallows would act as this instrument or if the body was moved to a different structure to hang. In France, the gallows and gibbet were not only separate structures but separated geographically; Cohen, "To Die," 294.

106 *Bartholomaei*, 439. See also, *Lanercost*, 35, for how Dafydd ap Gruffydd's head was bound with iron lest it should fall to pieces.

107 Royer, *English Execution Narrative*, 49; cf. *St Albans Chronicle*, vol.1, 563.

108 Royer, *English Execution Narrative*, 17.

murder of Richard Marshal, earl of Pembroke: “the miserable body was divided into four parts, which were sent to four of the chief cities, so that this lamentable spectacle might inspire fear in all beholders.”¹⁰⁹ William Wallace’s quartered remains in 1305 were similarly intended as a communal memory to his misdeeds: his head was displayed on London Bridge, his left arm at Berwick, his right arm at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, his left foot at Aberdeen and his right foot at Perth.¹¹⁰ This reinforced the boundaries of the area where peace and royal sovereignty had been restored. Similarly, Gilbert de Middleton’s body was divided and sent to Newcastle, York, Bristol and Dover as *remiranda*.¹¹¹ John Hardyng, in response to the punishments of rebels by Henry VII, asserted that the display of quartered limbs was primarily a means of deterrence, so “that theyr naughtie dooynges and foolishe entrepryses might bee a document for other hereafter to beware.”¹¹²

Body parts might also be sited for a specific symbolic purpose. In 1388, Thomas Usk’s head was “placed above the gate of Newgate because his family lived in that part of the city and was much hated.”¹¹³ The dismembered parts of two Coventry citizens (Pratt and Slouth) were displayed at the four main gates in 1523 as an example of their specific conspiracy against the city and their symbolic expulsion, while also redefining the boundaries of the jurisdiction.¹¹⁴ The gates obviously channeled visitors to and from the town, but were also sites for the ceremony of royal entries, the maintenance of leperhouses, and the exorcizing of demons, thus acting as points of transit, honor, security, marginality, and infamy; as Joëlle Rollo-Koster stated, “gates are the quintessential archetype of liminality.”¹¹⁵ The influence of such displays upon the populous is no better illustrated than by the actions of the 1381 rebels, who processed through London’s streets with the heads of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Treasurer, Robert Hales, on poles, “before being set up on London Bridge. The hallowed head of the archbishop they set in the middle and higher than the others and to make it specially recognizable among them they nailed on it a scarlet cap.”¹¹⁶

The desecration of the body, particularly through the processes of drawing and dismemberment, was not just a visually humiliating and gruesome sight, but directly affronted the medieval conception of a good death. The display was no less horrifying to the onlooker than the knowledge that the victim would receive no proper burial. Such consternation was seen in the determination of Andrew

109 *Matthaei Parisiensis*, vol. 4, 193–7; *Flores Historiarum*, vol. 2, 253. See also, *Matthaei Parisiensis*, vol. 3, 497–8, for a similar punishment upon an anonymous knight in 1238.

110 *Political Songs*, ed. Wright, 321–2; *Lanercost*, 175–6; Westerhof, “Deconstructing,” 105.

111 *Select Cases*, 78

112 *The Chronicle of John Hardyng, together with the continuation by Richard Grafton*, ed. Henry Ellis (London: F. C. & J. Rivington, 1812), 576.

113 *Knighton*, 500–1.

114 Charles Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 253–4. See also: Cohen, *Crossroads*, 75–6, 190; Cohen, “To Die,” 290.

115 Rollo-Koster, “Politics,” 94.

116 *Westminster*, 6–7.

Harclay's sister to seek permission from the king to bury his displayed remains some five years after the execution.¹¹⁷ However, public rotting cadavers and dismemberment were not the norm for executions. Although earlier rituals also appear to have emphasized the expulsion of an outcast from the Christian community, by the fourteenth century most executed persons were allowed burial in a churchyard and accompanying burial rites. In 1352 Archbishop Zouche asserted that church burial could not be denied to penitent criminals who died on the gallows.¹¹⁸ In 1388, John Beauchamp, James Berners, and Simon Burley were allowed to be beheaded rather than drawn and hanged, and were then buried soon after in abbeys and chapels.¹¹⁹ The accounts of those who survived hangings, such as Walter Eghe and Walter Poynant, often describe the revival as taking place during preparations for burial in a churchyard.¹²⁰

It was apparently left to relatives or friends to collect the body and arrange the burial. This meant that strangers and outsiders were more likely to be left to rot on the gallows, which might be why we see religious groups such as the Hospitallers increasingly involved, primarily as an act of charity.¹²¹ Some towns designated certain graveyards as the appropriate place to bury criminals. In Norwich, the graveyard of St Margaret was just 100m inside the town walls from Magdalen Gate, the gate near which the gallows were sited. The suffix to the church dedication was *ubi sepeliuntur suspensi* ("where those who have been hanged are buried"). The excavation of this churchyard revealed that many burials were undertaken without much care, with the head facing the wrong direction, the bodies face-down rather than supine, and many still clothed; "some had clearly been thrown into pits with little ceremony ... and had their hands behind their backs, implying they were tied."¹²² Other churches on the edges of towns, near execution sites, are also known to have been burial grounds for felons, such as St Giles at Oxford and Holy Innocents at Lincoln.¹²³ In 1523, Alice Hungerford was buried at Greyfriars, London, "in the nether end," implying a section that was marginal even within the graveyard.¹²⁴

From the procession and means of execution to the burial or bodily display, participants and spectators could interpret late medieval execution rituals in several ways. Its symbolism could be read as an exemplum of political power but also as a moral lesson of atonement. As Esther Cohen has argued, the gallows procession simultaneously symbolized the expulsion of the individual from the commonalty, with retributive justice served and the social equilibrium restored, while also

117 Westerhof, "Deconstructing," 105. Those who were burned obviously faced the same "bad death" and the lack of any type of burial.

118 Summerson, "Attitudes," 131.

119 *Westminster*, 330–3; *Knighton*, 500–3.

120 *Crime*, ed. Musson, 180–1, 5.13; *Knighton*, 188–91.

121 Summerson, "Attitudes," 131.

122 Brian Ayers, *Norwich: Archaeology of a Fine City* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2013).

123 Summerson, "Attitudes," 131–2.

124 *Grey Friars*, 31.

offering the condemned a chance for reconciliation into the *corpus Christianorum*. There was a noticeable post-Black Death shift in the perceived emphasis of executions, with increasing stress on redemption as much as expulsion. The late medieval English experience was no different, even if it lacked the formality and extent of Continental practices. The procession to the gallows became an exercise in demonstrating repentance and the right to remain part of the Christian community. However, the spectacle did not lose its fundamental purpose of asserting discipline through a demonstration of legitimate violence. For traitors against the king and realm, capital punishment was an exercise in humiliation, dishonor, and suffering, with no chance of redemption in this world or the next.

7

GHOSTLY KNIGHTS: KINGS' FUNERALS IN FOURTEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE AND THE EMERGENCE OF AN INTERNATIONAL STYLE

*Mikhail A. Boytsov**

In one of the most impressive (albeit strange) funerary customs ever to have evolved at medieval European courts, the deceased but soon-to-be-buried prince appeared suddenly in full armor, mounted on his best horse, processing in his own funeral train. At least this was the distinct impression left to the astonished mourners following the rider, whose face could not be distinguished because of the closed helmet visor but whose stature resembled strongly that of the deceased, and whose suit of armor, weapons and steed identified the departed. When the knight also displayed the symbols of death – his coat of arms upturned, his weapons often disordered or broken – he must have looked even more weird and ghostly.

The mysterious rider appeared not on his own, but only as one element of a specific and rather complex funeral protocol. These new rites culminated now in a solemn procession of mourners coming to the church where the knight was to be buried carrying offerings for the repose of his soul, donations certainly of money but (perhaps of greater literal and symbolic value) the armor and horses that had formerly been the property of the deceased. Neither any specific geographic point-of-origin nor any distinct paths of diffusion for this funerary ritual have been identified to date. Historians can follow generally the beginnings of this custom from roughly 1300, although it might have emerged at least half a century earlier. By the time that this eerie rite is definitely attested in our sources – from about the mid-fourteenth century – the practice had spread widely and quite rapidly, reaching across the continent to the most influential courts of Central and Western Europe in just a few decades.

* This work represents some of the results of the project, *Eastern and Western Europe in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period: Historical and Cultural Commonalities, Regional Peculiarities and the Dynamics of Interaction*, carried out within the framework of The Basic Research Program of the National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow) in 2015.

Urszula Borkowska believes that the starting point of this custom was the Polish royal court. From there, she traces its progress first to Hungary and eventually, if we are persuaded of her argument, to other European courts.¹ However, Borkowska's entire theory is based on a single phrase (not even a sentence) used by a certain Janko from Czarnków in his account of the funeral ceremony of King Casimir III the Great in 1370. Within a larger discussion of rites, Janko described one during which the poles of the royal banners were solemnly broken, and here he adds: *ut moris est in talibus observari* – “as it is usual to observe in such circumstances.”² However, the chronicler concentrates here – contrary to the interpretation of Borkowska – not on funeral festivities in general but only on one single episode. He asserted nothing more than the mere fact that it had been usual (or he wanted to present this as usual) to damage and even destroy the banners in the course of the funeral ceremony. No word in this phrase concerns our living-dead horsemen, and there are even fewer hints about the country where the new complex of these mortuary rites – either as a whole or in any of its individual elements – was born.

No doubt, the Polish chronicler described the mourning ceremonies of 1370 in great detail, but his colleagues from other countries were not less circumspect. A Hungarian chronicler depicted the mourning ceremonies in Visegrád, Buda, and Székesfehérvár following the death of King Charles Robert in 1342; a German chronicler delineated the burial in Frankfurt of the abdicated King of the Romans, Gunther of Schwarzburg in 1349; and another German recorded the funeral ceremonies for Emperor Charles IV in 1378 in Prague. This unusually rich collection of narratives and the abundance of detail they relate leave the impression that all these chroniclers described scenes that were somewhat novel for them, as well as for their targeted audience.

Contrary to Borkowska, Nadia Pollini has examined funeral rites in the Duchy of Savoy and claims that at least the custom of leading horses in a solemn procession and then donating them to the sepulchral church must have been borrowed from England.³ Her opinion is reinforced by Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, who points to several documented English cases of the donation of horses and arms as part of the funeral ritual between 1291 and 1296.⁴ And the line separating the offering of horses and arms from “offering” an armored horseman is rather thin.

Murielle Gaudé-Ferragu is convinced – and with good reason – that the custom of “ghostly knights” must have emerged approximately in the mid-thirteenth

1 Urszula Borkowska, “The Funeral Ceremonies of the Polish Kings from the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36, no. 4 (1985): 515–516.

2 Jan Kąty Słachtowski, ed., “Joannis de Czarnków Chronicon Polonorum,” in *Monumenta Poloniae Historica – Pomniki dziejowe Polski* (Lviv: Druk. Ossolińskich, 1872), 2:648.

3 Nadia Pollini, *La mort du prince: Rituels funéraires de la maison de Savoie, 1343–1451* (Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, Faculté des lettres, Section d'histoire, 1994).

4 Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, “L'offrande des chevaux. Une question ouverte,” in *À cheval entre histoire et droit: Hommage à Jean-François Poudret*, ed. Eva Maier, Antoine Rochat, and Denis Tappy (Lausanne: Bibliothèque historique vaudoise, 1999), 115.

century either in England or in Flanders.⁵ She points here to the will of William Beauchamp, ninth Earl of Warwick, compiled in 1269, where he wished that his body in the funeral train be preceded by an armed knight. Strictly speaking, this knight could not wear the armor of the late earl but rather his own. No such doubts can emerge at least in the case of Gui of Dampierre, Count of Flanders and Marquis of Namur, who bequeathed in his will of 1299 his armor and his “richest” charger to the abbey of Beaulieu.⁶ The charger should be covered with the best horse armor (*mes milleurs couvertures de fier*) and conducted in the funeral train, preceding the corpse of the testator, by a knight equipped with the best “armor for war” of the deceased (*mes milleurs armeures de wieres*) as well as everything suitable to an armored knight (*quanques il affiert au cors d'un chevalier armer*).⁷

It seems that regional princes and not kings were the “inventors” of the new funeral rituals. The courts of kings appear to have been adopters of these innovations when they copied them only decades after earls and counts had introduced them. For this reason, it seems unlikely that the French royal court invited the “ghost” of a late ruler to ride in his own funeral procession in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. We should appreciate the accuracy of one French chronicler as he praised the mourning rites for the famous captain and *connétable de France*, Bertrand du Guesclin, in 1389 as ones that might befit even “barons and princes” (*in sepulturis baronum et principum*).⁸ On the other hand, he was surely exaggerating when he claimed on a following page that the festivities were held “in the royal manner” (*more regio*).⁹ In fact, the “ghost” ceremonies were not yet “royal” in the Kingdom of France at that time, although they were appearing at royal courts in other lands far to the east of it.

The first-known instance of this funerary practice in a royal setting dates back to 1342, at the burial of the Hungarian King Charles Robert of Anjou.¹⁰ The funeral train concluded with three knights (one holding the royal banner) dressed in the late king's armor and riding his racers. The horses were covered not with mourning black, but with purple caparisons that must have belonged to the king. Two

5 Murielle Gaude-Ferragu, *D'or et de cendres. La mort et les funérailles des princes dans le royaume de France au bas Moyen Âge* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2005), 179.

6 Ibid.

7 Auguste Deshaisnes, and Jules Finot, eds., *Inventaire sommaire des Archives départementales antérieures à 1790. Nord. Archives civiles – série B. Chambre des comptes de Lilles art. 1 à 652* (Lille: Imprimerie L. Danel, 1899), 1:313.

8 Louis François Bellaguet, ed., *Chronique du religieux de Saint-Denys, contenant le règne de Charles VI, de 1380 à 1422, publiée en latin pour la première fois et traduite* (Paris: Imprimerie de Crapelet, 1839), 1:602.

9 Ibid., 1:600.

10 See the general survey of royal funerals in medieval Hungary in the study of Áron Petneki, “Exequiae Regis: Die Begräbniszeremonie des Königs Matthias Corvinus vor ihrem ungarischen Hintergrund,” in *Der Tod des Mächtigen: Kult und Kultur des Todes spätmittelalterlicher Herrscher*, ed. Lothar Kolmer (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1997), 113–123.

knights were armored for two different types of tournaments (*tornamentum* and *hastiludium*),¹¹ and the third one as if he were prepared for battle.¹² Each one of the knights held a shield decorated with the coat of arms of the deceased king.¹³ All the metal parts of the harness were made of silver-gilt and very skillfully decorated; their refinement hinted at their royal provenance. Much jewelry shone on the horses and the knights, the latter proceeding *in persona et spiritu eiusdem domini regis* – “imitating the appearance and style of the lord their king” – as the chronicler pointedly noticed.¹⁴ These significant words reveal that, at least in the opinion of the chronicler, the “ghostly knights” reproduced the external appearance of the dead king (*in persona*), as well as his demeanor (*in spiritu*). The role of the “ghost” knights during the ceremony was not ambiguous: they stood guard at the front of the main portal of the church, where the royal obsequies were to be held.¹⁵

In 1349, in Frankfurt am Main, Count Gunther of Schwarzburg – who had only recently renounced the royal throne – was buried with unusual pomp. In the mourning procession the bier was followed by four horsemen. The first had neither armor, nor weapons, but held the count’s banner. He was followed by an unmounted horse caparisoned with a saddle-cloth probably decorated with Gunther’s arms or devices. Then followed two more horsemen, armed but without helmets. The fourth and final figure was a horseman in armor, helmeted and holding Gunther’s sword and shield. It is most likely that this helmet and armor, together with all these horses, also had belonged to the deceased. Thus, the account itemizes the banner, the sword, and the shield of the deceased count (or “abdicated king”) playing a role in the funeral observances by representing the dead king.

The last knight-figure seems to have been the culmination of the procession, judging by the highest concentration of “memorial objects” connected with him. There are reasons to recognize in him the main figure in the whole train. First of all, this horseman received the most honorable place, for in many types of medieval processions the deployment of symbolic meanings built up gradually to a dramatic finale, and not vice versa.¹⁶ Second, only this last knight was accompanied by a magnificent suite: sixteen persons with downturned (that is, extinguished?) torches

11 The author means here probably the *Buhurt* (melee) and the joust; see Erik Fügedi, “Turniere im mittelalterlichen Ungarn,” in *Das ritterliche Turnier im Mittelalter. Beiträge zu einer vergleichenden Formen- und Verhaltensgeschichte des Rittertums*, ed. Josef Fleckenstein, *Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte* 80 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 395.

12 Johannes de Thurocz, *Chronica Hungarorum, Textus*, ed. Erzsébet Galántai and Gyula Kristó (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1985), 1:156.

13 *Ibid.*, 157.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*, 157–158.

16 This must be true also for the two types of processions considered here without any particular differentiation between them: the funeral cortège bearing the corpse to the church and the offering procession to the altar, before which the catafalque was already installed. The “ghostly knights” could appear in either or both of them.

in their hands (according to one version of this account),¹⁷ or holding burning candles and torches, but also a sword and shield pointed or rotated downward (if we follow another version).¹⁸ This last knight enjoyed the ultimate place of honor in the procession, he was accompanied by a brilliant escort, and he bore symbols indicating the passing of a mighty personage – all these things confirm our belief, despite the silence of the textual evidence, that the trailing knight personified the deceased prince, just as the Hungarian example cited above also demonstrates.

Our next example, drawn from the writing of Janko from Czarńkow, is less ambiguous. In 1370, a horseman “representing the person of this deceased king” (*ipsius regis mortui personam repraesentans*) participated in the funeral procession of King Casimir III the Great.¹⁹ He rode Casimir’s best and favorite horse, covered with a “purple” (presumably royal) caparison. Dressed in the late king’s embroidered gold coat the knight followed the banner-bearers and rode into the church. Here the chronicler emphasized clearly once more that this knight “represented the person of the king” (*ipsum militem ipsius regis personam repraesentantem*).²⁰

When the Emperor Charles IV of Luxembourg was buried in 1378 in Prague, according to the detailed account of one anonymous chronicler from Augsburg, the main part of the funeral procession concluded with the appearance of a knight similar to those we have seen from other rites. This rider wore a helmet decorated with a golden crown and ermine, and held in his hand a naked sword, with the edge turned to the ground.²¹ It seems that the same knight reappeared later in the account, riding this time under a golden canopy, a privilege that even kings and emperors often considered to be too excessive for them.²² The chronicler does not identify this “ghostly rider” with the dead monarch explicitly, but the crown on the helmet is sufficient evidence for our purposes.²³

17 Johannes Latomus, “Acta aliquot vetustiora in civitate Francofurtensi... collecta, 793–1519,” in *Fontes rerum Germanicarum*, ed. Johann Friedrich Böhrer (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1868), 4: 90–91. On the sources used by the antiquarian Johannes Latomus (1524–1600), see Richard Froning, “Die beiden Frankfurter Chroniken des Johannes Latomus und ihre Quellen,” *Archiv für Frankfurts Geschichte und Kunst, Neue Folge* 8 (1882): 233–318.

18 Latomus, “Acta aliquot vetustiora in civitate Francofurtensi... collecta. 793–1519,” 4:414. This version is preferred by Rudolf J. Meyer, *Königs- und Kaiserbegräbnisse im Spätmittelalter: Von Rudolf von Habsburg bis zu Friedrich III* (Cologne, Vienna, Weimar: Böhlau, 2000), 90.

19 Jan Kąty Szlachetowski, ed., “Joannis de Czarńkow Chronicon Polonorum,” in *Monumenta Poloniae Historica – Pomniki dziejowe Polski* (Lwów: Druk. Ossolińskich, 1872), 2:646.

20 Ibid., 648.

21 “Die Augsburger Chronik von 1368 bis 1406, mit Fortsetzung bis 1447,” in *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte: Augsburg* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1865), (*Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte vom 14. bis ins 16. Jahrhundert* 4), 1:61.

22 Ibid., 62.

23 František Šmahel, who has worked extensively on this funeral celebration, does not question if “the knight with the sword” was “the knight under the canopy”; neither does he question if this knight (or these knights) represented the emperor; see František Šmahel, “Smutění ceremonie a rituály při pohřbu císaře Karla IV,” *Český časopis historický*

In contrast, the funeral of Duke Amadeus VI of Savoy in 1383 made the identity of the eerie final knight quite explicit. The organizers of these services mentioned unequivocally that a knight wearing the armor of the late Duke was to “represent” the person of the deceased prince (*et celuy representera la personne de monseigneur*).²⁴ The elaborate staging of these send-offs, and re-enacting the role of the deceased in them, were certainly remunerated activities, as we can see in at least one example. Someone earned five *sous* in 1375 for “imitating the deceased knight” (*pour avoir fait le Chevalier défunt*) at the funeral of Vicomte Jean de Polignac.²⁵

Now we may return to the 1389 obsequies of Bertrand du Guesclin. Four mounted knights rode into the church while the memorial service was sung. The knights paraded the deceased constable’s weapons in such a powerful display “that they seemed to demonstrate his physical presence” (*ut quasi ejus corporalem presenciam demonstrarent*).²⁶ They were followed by another set of four riders, and although their horses belonged to the king and not to the deceased (nine years had already passed since the death of du Guesclin, and his own horses would therefore surely no longer make a good impression), their armor had once belonged to the *connétable*.²⁷

So far our sources reveal unequivocally that the “ghostly knights” were understood by contemporaries in various European lands in similar fashion – they functioned as “representations” of the person who was to be buried. (Even if that person had died years earlier and been buried long ago, as in du Guesclin’s case, when obstacles had prevented the staging of a funeral worthy of so great a man.) If that is the case, then these knights appeared indeed to be a bit “ghostly” – the title of this article is far from misleading the reader! But such characters playing their roles in the high drama of public royal mourning might also be interpreted in an even more sophisticated way. The following example, drawn from the region of the Pyrenees, will satisfy our purposes well.

Doubtless none of the episodes mentioned above can compare for elaborate and dramatic refinement to the solemn requiem of Prince Archambaud of Foix-Béarn, who had died two years earlier, in 1414 at Orthez (at that time the capital of the sovereign Viscounty of Béarn). Not only was the scenario of these celebrations conceived in a very sophisticated way, but also the quantity and quality of documentation left to us is superior to almost everything else we can find – for example, in German lands – during the entire fifteenth century.²⁸ This surprising

91 (1993): 401–416; and “Spectaculum et pompa funebris: Das Leichenzeremoniell bei der Bestattung Kaiser Karls IV,” in František Šmahel, *Zur politischen Präsentation und Allegorie im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert* (München: Oldenbourg, 1994), 1–37.

24 Pollini, *La mort du prince*, 170.

25 Ralph E. Giesey, *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1960), 90; also reproduced in Wolfgang Brückner, “Roß und Reiter im Leichenzeremoniell: Deutungsversuch eines historischen Rechtsbrauches,” *Rheinisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 15/16 (1964–1965), 152–153.

26 Bellaguet, *Chronique du religieux de Saint-Denys, contenant le règne de Charles VI*, 1:600.

27 Ibid., 602.

28 Such intricate liturgies of loss and mourning were innovative even in Foix-Béarn; see Froissart’s 1391 description of the funeral in Orthez of the Count of Foix, with a much

wealth of evidence offers us the contrasting perspectives of both the organizers and observers of one ritual event.

Shortly before the beginning of the memorial celebrations in Orthez, a certain Arnauton d'Arroscaa committed himself to dress in black clothes with the coat of arms of Archambaud and to mount the horse of the late prince (here the animal is labeled as *le cheval, menant le deuil* – “the horse leading the mourning procession”), caparisoned in black and carrying Archambaud's coat of arms.²⁹ A black pennon (a triangular ensign) was tied tightly around the neck of the rider since it was expressly forbidden that it should touch the ground – why exactly, we do not know. With everything arranged in fitting order, Arnauton left the castle with eight unmounted companions outfitted in mourning robes. The companions did not directly address those they met on the way, but rather performed for them a brief drama. Arnauton's companions asked him loudly: “Arnauton, where are you taking us?” And he replied: “We are going to announce that count Archambaud ... is dead and everyone can take part in his burial.”

Having solemnly processed in this way around the castle environs, Arnauton d'Arroscaa discharged his other duties. At regular intervals, he announced several times the demise of Count Archambaud to his widow, who fainted each time as if she had just received this sad news about her husband's demise (whom she had already buried two years earlier) for the first time. It is obvious that this “ghostly knight” acted not as a representation of the late count, but rather as the herald of his death. The mere fact that the companions of Arnauton demonstratively addressed him by his name emphasized the distance between him and the deceased Archambaud.

As the time for the funeral procession came, the “horse leading the mourning procession” took its place, followed by four other horses. The last one carried the banner and coat of arms of the late count.³⁰ The text remains unclear how exactly this was done: either the banner and the shield were attached somehow to the empty saddle or there was a rider holding these objects. If the latter, then the rider remained “invisible” to our narrator (as perhaps in the case of the preceding three also). But Arnauton on the contrary was here “visible” for him. When the four “new” horses were led into the church, Arnauton's horse was detained for some time outside. Only when the widow and son of the late count took their places and the memorial service started, did Arnauton d'Arroscaa slowly ride into the church, approach the empty bier (the corpse had already been buried two years earlier) and then left the building again. He repeated this three times, although the precise significance of this repetition has not come down to us.

simpler scenario, “corresponding to local custom” (*selon l'usage du lieu*), in Joseph Kervyn de Lettenhove, *Oeuvres de Froissart* (Bruxelles: Devaux, 1872), 14:338–339.

29 This entire episode as retold here follows the study of Pierre Tucoc-Chala, “Les honneurs funèbres d'Archambaud de Foix-Béarn à Orthez en 1414,” *Revue de Pau et du Béarn* 5 (1977), 11–18.

30 Pierre Tucoc-Chala, “Quand les Foix-Béarn rêvaient d'entrées royales (XIVe-XVe siècles),” in *Les Entrées: Gloire et déclin d'un cérémonial, colloque du 10 et 11 mai 1996, Château de Pau*, ed. Christian Desplat (Biarritz: J & D, 1997), 15.

Finally, several men dressed in black brought “*le cheval, menant le deuil*” into the church for the fourth and last time. Arnauton sank from his saddle onto the floor in a sign of mourning and thereafter everyone present rushed to strip from his neck the pennon and tear it to pieces, as well as the caparison with the coat of arms. At that moment another knight arrived, this time equipped for a tournament. On his neck hung the inverted shield of count Archambaud and he held in his hand the naked sword of the count. This sword was handed over to some person who brought it to the son and heir of the deceased. The shield was reversed properly and hung on the canopy erected above the bier (a construction in European funeral praxis that would later be known as *castrum doloris*).

An inverted shield with the coat of arms was a universal symbol of the death of its owner, dating back perhaps to the earliest period of European heraldry. Matthew Paris in the thirteenth century, describing the death of Richard the Lionheart in 1199, already used this symbol. He drew in the margin of his manuscript an inverted shield with the English royal coat of arms – *clipeus regis Ricardi*.³¹ A few pages later he displays the same coat of arms, but in a normal position – to illustrate the account of the beginning of the reign of the new king of England, John Lackland.³² The manipulation of the shield of Count Archambaud should be understood within this same semantic. Hanging upside down on the neck of the knight (who must have also “represented” the deceased), it certainly designated the death of its owner. However, as soon as it was displayed correctly, it became a proclamation of the continuity of the Archambault dynasty materialized in the person of his son, who had just received his father’s sword from the hand of his “representation.” The whole spectacular ceremony, in fact, was arranged by Archambault’s widow two years after the real funeral of her husband for a single purpose – to visualize and legalize the transfer of power to her son who had just come of age.

We should underscore here one specific episode of the ceremony – the knight fallen from his horse in the midst of the church. No matter if this expressive gesture was invented in Béarn (which looks rather unlikely) or somewhere else, it enjoyed a great future in funeral rituals. Thus, at the opposite edge of Catholic Europe – in Poland – the most touching moment of the royal funeral in the sixteenth century consisted of the same action: a knight riding in the funeral procession suddenly falling to the church floor with much drama.³³ However, in this case the scene can be explained more easily than its analogue in Orthez. For the Polish tradition considered this knight unequivocally a “representation” of the deceased king. Consequently, his downfall marked the “true death” of the king – a ritual substantially similar to the famous Early Modern French custom, when the statement, “the King is dead...,” was proclaimed only after the coffin with the king’s corpse

31 Matthew Paris, *Matthaei Parisiensis, monachi Sancti Albani, Historia Anglorum, sive, ut vulgo dicitur, Historia minor: item, eiusdem Abbrevatio chronicorum Angliae*, ed. Frederic Madden (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, Dyer, 1866), (Rolls 44/2), 2:76.

32 Ibid., 2:78.

33 Borkowska, “The Funeral Ceremonies of the Polish Kings from the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries,” 127–128.

was lowered into the grave. Up to this very moment the king was supposed to be, in some way, not completely dead.

All these mysterious horsemen taking part in late medieval funeral ceremonies have caused modern historians to speculate on their meaning, but the proffered theories rest on the slender evidential basis of even fewer cases than those enumerated in the first part of this study. The German anthropologist Wolfgang Brückner seems to have been the first to question the most exotic explanations which had claimed that the custom under discussion must have been rooted in some archaic Indo-European rituals and somehow related to human sacrifices made upon funeral mounds (the idea being that the “ghostly knights” taking part in medieval funeral trains were also “sacrificed,” even if only symbolically).³⁴

Brückner, however, extended his critique also to medieval texts, particularly those where such mourning knights were called “representations” of the deceased persons. Brückner’s skepticism might be explained by the fact that he was aware of only two suitable episodes (not counting a brief mention of the “representation” of Vicomte de Polignac, quoted above), namely, the burial of Emperor Charles IV in 1378 and the mourning rites for the *connétable* Bertrand du Guesclin in 1389. Moreover, the first text does not identify *explicitly* the knight wearing the armor of the deceased as a “representation” of the late Emperor. But since Brückner’s time, we have many more medieval accounts at our disposal than were available to him. While surely still incomplete, this collection provides strong evidence for the argument that contemporaries indeed recognized in these mysterious knights some kind of representation of those princes who were to be buried (or in some rather exceptional cases, as we remember, individuals already interred many years earlier).

Brückner’s point was that a “ghostly knight” did not, in fact, represent the dead “person,” but rather “a symbolic embodiment, separated from the corpse, of the transitory status identity of the deceased.”³⁵ One could agree with this argument, asking only if the “status identity” could not be acknowledged as the main component of any medieval “personality” in the eyes of contemporaries? Maybe Brückner is allowing himself to be guided by a modern vision of the human *persona*, one much less dependent on its social status than was the case in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries?

The examples given above, however, show that the funeral ceremonies tended to display not only the status identity of the dead lord but also some aspect of his individuality, as perceived at the time. We notice too that the chroniclers of late medieval funeral ceremonies (surely along with at least a substantial part of the audience that witnessed such rites) were especially impressed with seeing, maybe for the first time, not only manifestations of the deceased’s status but also his important personal possessions displayed in the funeral procession. For example, at the funeral

34 Even after Brückner’s attack, the “Indo-European theory” managed to keep its adherents, see for example, Hans Martin Schaller, “Der Kaiser stirbt,” in *Tod im Mittelalter*, ed. Arno Borst, Gerhart von Graevenitz, Alexander Patschovsky, and Karlheinz Stierle (Constance: Universitätsverlag, 1993), 70, 75.

35 Brückner, “Roß und Reiter im Leichenzeremoniell,” 156.

of King Charles Robert in 1342 many in the crowd – according to the chronicler – burst into tears after catching sight of those very insignia under which the King had “happily ruled Hungary.”³⁶ Therefore, the insignia (as well as the chargers also mentioned in the same passage) appeared in the eyes of those who had stayed close to the person of the late monarch not primarily as transpersonal attributes of royal power, but rather as things closely linked with the person of their deceased *seigneur*.

No scholar has noticed the similarities between the custom of inviting a “representation” of the deceased prince to take part in his funeral procession and other typical funerary customs, best known in Italy but also practiced elsewhere. Thus, in a typical Florentine funeral procession, a servant of the deceased rode before the coffin holding a pole with a cross-bar from which hung the best dress of his late master. It was intended as a donation to the church where the dead man was to be buried.³⁷

The gift of the deceased’s best clothes to a particular church was a very old custom that can be traced back at least to the eleventh century in various European regions. It corresponded perfectly with entrusting the human body which had once worn these very clothes to the same church. Accordingly, clothing must have been seen mainly as the material substitute of the deceased individual who was then regarded as a combination of his own personal characteristics and his social role. Needless to say, “the best attire” carried in the procession must have represented most potently the official status of the deceased. This is consistent, for example, with one of the earliest surviving financial accounts in the Duchy of Saxony reflecting how Duke Frederick the Belligerent was laid to rest in 1428. In the funeral procession, the duke’s official robe worn as prince-electoral was displayed ahead of his coffin.³⁸ This piece of clothing corresponded with the highest of all the titles the late duke had possessed – which helps us understand the general logic of how the specific garment used in funeral processions was chosen.

The “status apparel” was offered to the church also in the case of noble women, but here the garment in question was usually the wedding dress of the deceased. This is understandable, since the position of a woman in society was determined primarily by her marriage. Apparently in accordance with this tradition, Countess Jeanne d’Étampes (d. 1389) bequeathed to the abbey of Saint-Denis three gorgeous dresses (*sumptuosa vestimenta triplicia*) that she had changed into, one after another, on the day of her first wedding.³⁹

In a similar case, when Queen Isabella of England was buried in 1358 wearing the wedding gown she had worn at her marriage to Edward II fifty years earlier, I believe historians have erred who interpret this as a display of sentimentality or

36 Thurocz, *Chronica Hungarorum*, 1:157.

37 Robert Davidsohn, *Geschichte von Florenz: Kirchliches und geistiges Leben, Kunst, öffentliches und häusliches Dasein* (Berlin: Mittler und Sohn, 1927), 4/3: 373.

38 Brigitte Streich, *Zwischen Reiseherrschaft und Residenzbildung: Der Wettinische Hof im späten Mittelalter* (Cologne, Vienna: Böhlau, 1989), 484.

39 Bellaguet, *Chronique du religieux de Saint-Denys, contenant le règne de Charles VI, de 1380 à 1422*, 1:606.

possible remorse. (She had, after all, deprived her husband of his throne and ultimately even of his life!)⁴⁰ Isabella was buried in her wedding dress because such was the custom for the burial of women of her social strata. To attribute any other motive to this act is, at best, speculative.

Just as the wedding gown was the most appropriate posthumous identifier for a noble woman or a gown with an ermine collar for a prince-elector, the suit of armor, weapons, and chargers must have been the most appropriate identifiers for a deceased nobleman. Accordingly, all these things would have been displayed in his funeral procession to the church of burial. Certainly it was easier in logistical terms to carry helmet, sword, shield, and spear (possibly with the banner attached to it) separately. One could scarcely carry the whole panoply of heavy armor suspended from a cross-bar, as was usual with the gowns of advocates and scholars, or the festive suits of craftsmen and other burghers. However, another simple and natural solution was easily found: the armor must be displayed as it always was – on a human body. Therefore, I suppose that a knight in armor appeared initially in funeral processions only in the modest role of a “garment rack” (mannequin). However, the figure of such a knight must have looked so evocative that inevitably it began to enrich itself with new meanings. This opened the way for the transformation of a “rider-rack” into a new incarnation of the deceased, or into a herald of death – such as Arnauton d’Arroscas, for example, whom we discussed above.

When a church received as an offering the shield, helmet, and banner of a deceased nobleman, these objects were either hung above his tomb or attached to a wall somewhere in the nave.⁴¹ However, the donation of complete suits of armor must have required new forms of spatial memorialization of the deceased noblemen within the church. These forms must have looked like the votive effigies donated by living princes to churches since the late thirteenth century. These were statues portraying their donors full-size, as true to life as possible – sometimes even including their noble steeds. These representations were dressed in the actual clothing of the persons they represented. Dozens of such effigies are known to have been exhibited in the Florentine churches of Santa Annunziata and Santa Reparata. However, this was not a uniquely Florentine custom; similar displays were reported about the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie at Mantua, and it is reasonable to assume that there must have been many other church buildings with statues of the same type, and not only in Italy.⁴² So far, no one has examined how

40 See for example, Natalie Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II 1321–1326* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 212.

41 For a survey of kings’ tombs decorated with arms that could possibly have played a role in the funeral ceremonies, see Rudolf J. Meyer, *Königs- und Kaiserbegräbnisse im Spätmittelalter*, 240–283.

42 On votive sculptures see, Aby Moritz Warburg, “Bildniskunst und florentinisches Bürger-tum,” in *Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen*, 2nd ed., ed. Dieter Wuttke (Baden-Baden: Koerner, 1980), 65–102; Curt Heinrich Weigelt, “Geschichte der ‘bóti’ der SS. Annunziata,” *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz* 3 (1910–1932): 548; Guido Mazzoni, *I bóti della SS. Annunziata in Firenze* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1923); Susann Waldmann, *Die lebensgroße Wachsfigur: Eine Studie zu Funktion und Bedeutung der keroplastischen Porträtfigur vom*

many of these statues were donated by *living* persons and how many appeared in churches only posthumously, as part of commemorative programs that gathered those objects that had been used earlier in funerals.

A new form of offering procession – with a horseman stylized as the deceased person – was practiced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in parallel to another and probably older rite, in which clothes or armor with weapons were displayed as separate pieces, carried in the hands of different participants in the cortège, and not on the body of a special “actor.” In some cases we can even see how a new form superseded an older one – where the poles with horizontal bars were replaced by horsemen – even in those cases where the clothing intended for donation was clearly not too heavy to be carried. These important changes in the style of how a dead prince should be properly “represented” in his own mourning train can be illustrated by the account of another funeral for the Saxon ruling dynasty, that of Duke Ernst in 1486. Contrary to the order of a similar procession in 1428, the gown of the prince-electors was not just carried alone. Instead, the first place was assigned to a horseman clad in the dead prince’s tournament equipment. He was followed by another “ghostly knight” armed in the battle armor of the Duke. This rider was accompanied by a squire holding the prince’s spear. One more horseman followed them, dressed this time in the gown of the elector. In the organizer’s eyes, this figure was clearly perceived as the most important of the three riders. His predominance was unambiguously clear: a servant rode ahead of him holding a sword – surely the Duke’s processional sword, the one that had been carried directly before the ruling prince in life as a symbol of his power.⁴³

In some cases, a funeral procession could include two simultaneous “representations” of the late prince, although each of them had emerged independently from the other. This phenomenon can be observed at the English royal court in the late medieval period. At the demise of Edward IV in 1483, an anonymous “ceremonial expert” composed a memorandum describing the tradition of the royal funerals in England. In his version, the funeral cortege must contain both the funeral mannequin, or effigy (here called the *ymage*), and the “ghostly knight.” The effigies were usually made by the best court artists, in order to achieve the closest possible resemblance to the original. The faces of the effigies were produced from plastering material and later wax, possibly modeled from death masks.⁴⁴ The “expert” insisted that the effigy should be decorated with a crown, scepter, and the royal robe “... and so carry him in a chair open, with lights, banners, accompanied by lords and estates.” But thereafter in the burial procession “a lord or a knight”

Spätmittelalter bis zum 18. Jahrhundert (Munich: Tuduv, 1990), 14–43; and Andrea Klier, *Fixierte Natur: Naturabguss und Effigies im 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2004), 18–23.

43 Heinrich von Ende, “Letter Describing the Funeral of Count Ernst, September 13, 1486,” 10005-Hof- und Zentralverwaltung (Wittenberger Archiv), Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, loc. 4392, f. 1r.

44 Anthony Harvey and Richard Mortimer, eds., *The Funeral Effigies of Westminster Abbey* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994), 31–33.

must appear also carrying the royal coat of arms, armed with crowned helmet, shield, and spear, riding on a steed.⁴⁵ Presumably, the shield, spear, and charger must have belonged to the deceased king in the same way as his helmet and coat of arms did.

These recommendations of the connoisseur of the court ceremonial were not accepted in full for that occasion. The “man of arms” who finally participated in the funeral of Edward IV was bareheaded and held a battle-axe “with the pommel downward” instead of a shield and spear.⁴⁶ These changes became necessary because the “ghostly knight” required earlier by the “expert” had now partly been disassembled: the shield, sword, and the crowned helmet were displayed to the public separately (whereas the spear had not been mentioned by our informer at all). The horse was covered with a rich drapery bearing the king’s coat of arms (a point which organizers and the “experts” agreed on). The account does not reveal what finally happened with the weapons mentioned, but the dean of Westminster Abbey took and received the horse.⁴⁷ The steed was therefore a donation to the abbey, as were (presumably) all the weapons. In any case, we can establish that there were not two but three king’s bodies in the funeral train of Edward IV: the first was lying in his coffin unseen by the public, the second was his portrait in effigy (*a personage like to the symilitudo of the king in habet royall*),⁴⁸ and the bareheaded “man of arms” holding the King’s battle-axe incarnated the third one. Even the inventive Tudor lawyers could hardly risk claiming that English kings were in possession of three bodies (and not the physical and institutional two) at the same time.⁴⁹

Indeed, there were many examples of funeral processions containing not a fully attired “ghostly knight” but only some of his “constitutive parts” – some particularly significant items of knightly equipment of the late prince, such as his sword, spear, banner, shield, helmet, and horse(s). For example, at the funeral of Duke Ludwig of Bavaria in 1479, according to the chronicler Veit Arnpeck, “a knight, the eldest one in the whole principality, offered on the main altar the banner [of the late Duke], another one – [his] shield, the third one [...] his helmet with crest, and afterwards 14 knights offered seven horses, none of which cost less than 80 gulden.”⁵⁰ This type of mourning procession – where only the most significant pieces of weapons were brought alongside the horses – seems to be roughly contemporary with the ceremony in which the complete “ghostly knight” was present, or it may be even older, as has been already suggested above. In any case, the true relation between these two types of ceremonies still remains unclear. Did

45 James Gairdner, ed. “Funeral of Edward the Fourth,” in *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Reigns of Richard III and Henry VII* (London, 1861), (Rolls 24/1) 1:3–10.

46 Ibid., 9.

47 Ibid., 9–10.

48 Ibid., 6.

49 On these questions see first of all: Frederic Maitland, “The Crown as Corporation,” *Law Quarterly Review* 17 (1901): 131–146; and Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, repr. 1997).

50 Veit Arnpeck, *Sämtliche Chroniken* (Munich: Rieger, 1915), 624.

the “ghostly knight” evolve step by step from simpler processions with separate insignia and horses – individual objects that finally were “combined” into this impressive figure? Or did this figure emerge independently within the same funeral tradition, perhaps connected somehow with the evolution of the representative suits of armor? In any case, the type of “disassembled presentation” proved to be more stable than the version featuring the “ghostly knight.” The first partly endured into the twenty-first century: a caparisoned, riderless horse followed the catafalque of Ronald Reagan in 2004. It carried Reagan’s riding boots, again reversed – according to the traditional symbolic meaning that the reversed coats of arms had in late medieval princely funerals.⁵¹

Another option multiplied the number of mourning horsemen following the bier. Instead of one “ghostly knight,” several appeared. In some cases, all of them seem to be of the same symbolic relevance carrying equally the coats of arms or armors of the dead prince. But in others one of the riders was distinguished by his symbolism (the crowned helmet, a sword carried ahead) as the main “representation” of the deceased. Examples of both options were offered in the first part of this study. But more can be mentioned here. John de Warenne, seventh Earl of Surrey, dictated in his testament of 1347 that his funeral procession must include four knights, clad in his armor and mounted on his best horses, however, without establishing any hierarchy among them.⁵² When Louis II, Count of Flanders, was buried in Lille in 1384, eight noble horsemen, holding four banners for tournaments and four for war, preceded his catafalque. Eight more horsemen were armored: four for tournaments and four for battle.⁵³ They all held their spears downwards. Not every single piece of equipment had belonged to the count, judging by the list of donations made to the church during the funeral office. Eight shields, steeds, helmets, banners were offered, but only four swords (only those “for war,” whereas no swords “for tournaments” are mentioned).⁵⁴ We can assume that the armor and the rest of the weapons, such as the spears mentioned above, were the property of the noblemen.

The funeral processions of the Counts of Würtemberg Ulrich III and Ulrich V in Stuttgart in 1417 and 1480 respectively, offer additional details.⁵⁵ These accounts demonstrate the high level of ceremonial continuity at the court of Würtemberg, for the morphology of the latter funeral procession was very similar to that of the former. In both cases, there were six horsemen in the deceased’s suits of armor, followed each time by two “servants.” But the “ghostly knights” of these ceremonies were not drawn from the nobility: the ceremonial responsibilities were undertaken by such lowly folk as “Klaus from the stable” or “servant Zweikus.”⁵⁶ Still, four counts and

51 Another well-known example is the funeral procession of John F. Kennedy in 1963.

52 Gaude-Ferragu, *D’or et de cendres*, 180.

53 Ibid., 178.

54 Kervyn de Lettenhove, *Oeuvres de Froissart*, 21:265–267.

55 Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, “Cerimoniae Funebres,” 1417, A 602, WR 28, f. 7r–11r; and “Description of the Funeral of Count Ulrich V,” October 8, 1480, A 602, WR 211, f. 18r–34r.

56 Ibid., f. 23r–24v.

even more noblemen took the bridles and led the horses these modest servants were riding. They did this, of course, to honor not Klaus, Zweikus, and their colleagues, but rather the representation of their late lord being performed by Klaus and others. In both funerals, all coats of arms were reversed, all crests hung broken to the right-hand side, and all weapons pointed down. Three burning candles were attached to the grip of the sword as well as to the shield. After the ceremony, the horses were brought to the priest's house, where they were stripped of their rich textiles, which now passed to the clergy of the Church of Saint-Cross, the counts' traditional burying ground. The horses themselves, however, were redeemed by courtiers (as was usual also in other cases) for considerable amounts and they must have been returned to the court's stable.⁵⁷ Only a few late medieval accounts offer such detail about the organization of funeral cortèges.

In conclusion, we must assume that knights, clad in the attire of deceased princes, appeared in funeral processions as the result of a "ceremonial reform" initiated approximately in the mid-thirteenth century. Their ritual role originated at the courts of some higher nobility, probably in England, Flanders or other regions, such as Italy.⁵⁸ The traditional posthumous donations to sepulchral churches evolved into a highly impressive procession displaying publicly the specific "individuality" of the deceased as a noble warrior endowed with the virtues of knighthood. The ceremony could be "staged" with the participation of one or more "ghostly knights," but might also take place without them. Still, in every single case, significant items that belonged to the deceased's armor were displayed authoritatively to demonstrate the elevated status of the dead. This new style of aristocratic funeral representation broke ground in a princely milieu but was eventually copied by kings, as is attested in the 1342 funeral of King Charles Robert. Whether the Hungarian monarch from the Angevin dynasty could have imported the "new funeral style" from the Kingdom of Naples, where his grandfather had ruled and where he himself had spent the first twelve years of his life, is the subject of another study. A close examination of funeral traditions in Italian as well as French branches of the house of Anjou probably could also bring us to the roots of this new style. But more significant than the roots are the fruits of these ceremonial innovations, corresponding as they do to the new cultural role of knighthood and its virtues. Invented in the thirteenth century, the new funeral style spread throughout the courts of all Central Europe during the next 200 years, becoming in this way both international and enduring. Regardless of local variations and modifications, we still find it persisting into modern times. The "ghostly knights" constituted from the very beginning one of the most impressive elements of this new universal and trans-historical style.

57 Ibid., f. 25v.

58 Salimbene might have mentioned an early case of a new rite: in 1283 Count Lodovico di San Bonifacio dying at Reggio in Emilia bequeathed to the local Franciscan church his steed and weapons (*dextrarium et arma sua*). *Chronica Fratris Salimbene de Adam Ordinis Minorum*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger (Hannover, Leipzig: Hahn, 1905–1913), (*Monumenta Germaniae historica*, Scriptores 32), 514.

8

DEATH OF CLERGYMEN: POPES AND CARDINALS' DEATH RITUALS

Joëlle Rollo-Koster

In the course of chronicling the popes' lives, Werner, canon of Bonn, came to discuss Pope Urban V (1362–1370). After recounting the pope's life and deeds, he described the circumstances of his passing in this way:

In the same year [1370], in the month of November, our lord pope, who had returned to Avignon, weakened by his malady asked to be moved out of the papal palace to the house of his brother the cardinal of Albano, who was then in Bologna, where he died on 19th December. And his body was put in the chapel of Pope John XXII, which is in the church of Notre-Dame des Doms; and he remained there, where God worked many miracles for those who invoke his name, until the last day of May the following year. And on that day his bones were translated to the monastery of Saint Victor of Marseilles, of which he had formerly been the abbot, accompanied by a great multitude of people thanking God for all the things they had heard he had done. Because God works many miracles. And the great number of wax images hanging in front of his tomb and throughout the church of the monastery brought by those freed from danger or malady after invoking his name bear witness to this. Few churches in the world are so honored with vigils, and offerings. And he sat in St. Peter's Throne for 8 years, 1 month, and 17 days. The see remained vacant for 13 days.¹

L'abbé Chaillan, in his life of Pope Urban V, fills out this spare account of the pope's death with some further details gleaned from documents kept at the Vatican

1 Étienne Baluze and Guillaume Mollat, *Vitae paparum avenionensium; hoc est Historia pontificum romanorum qui in Gallia sederunt ab anno Christi MCCCIV usque ad annum MCCCXCIV* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1914), 1: 393.

Archives. Chaillan adds that, out of humility, Urban had not wished to die in the Apostolic Palace. But once transported to his brother's residence, the pope ordered all gates to be left open so anyone could enter freely and witness his passing. As he lay dying on a "poor" bed, Urban wore his usual Benedictine habit, holding in his hand a cross that he kissed lovingly.²

By medieval standards, his was a holy death. A good papal death was a public one and, as it still does today, the drama of a pope's passing captivated a wide audience. It was a slow and prolonged affair, during which the pope had ample time to examine his conscience, confess, and pray. The papal death publically modeled a kind of piety that persevered to the end, a religiosity orchestrated so the public could witness how a pope, the best of men, died. If the pope's death seemed perhaps scripted according to the familiar model of a "good death," if it offered to the faithful a model worthy of imitation, it is because a considerable literature had already described it so. "A 'good death' – emphasized by the popular *Ars moriendi* – accepted bodily suffering patiently and without complaint, which in turn led to salvation. The importance of the Final Moment was that it gave the hope of salvation to every Christian, irrespective of the life led up to that point."³ A good death could even save the worst of sinners, as medieval rites surrounding capital executions remind us.⁴ Medieval clerics taught their congregations that their prayers and suffrages facilitated the dead's smooth passage to the hereafter. They framed death as a commerce between the living and the dead in which the dying behaved properly with dignity, acceptance, and resignation while the living rewarded their holiness with intercessions beseeching their speedy, peaceful demise.

It is the purpose of this chapter to address a very specific late medieval development in the life of the Catholic Church as an institution: how the death of the highest ecclesiastical officers, the popes and cardinals, became ritualized and scripted, and to decipher the deeply internalized and tacit code of the curial deathwatch and mourning. My retrieval of this experience relies principally on two types of sources, ceremonial books and testaments. I have addressed elsewhere the moral lessons that audiences were intended to take from ecclesiastical funerals. Building from the conclusions of historians like Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, I have argued that the death of a pope was a liminal moment prone to contest and negotiations. Once the dual nature of the papacy was set in place (the pope dies but the Church continues), ritual created and demonstrated consensus on the one hand; but it also framed and limited the actions of the audience. Ceremonies and rites facilitated the transition from one leader to another.⁵

2 Marius Chaillan, *Le Bienheureux Urbain V (1310–1370)* (Paris: V. Lecoffre, 1911), 203–204.

3 Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066–1550* (London: Routledge, 1998), 40.

4 See, for example, Christopher F. Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 217–224.

5 See my *Raiding Saint Peter: Empty Sees, Violence, and the Initiation of the Great Western Schism (1378)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008).

The pope's funeral constituted an institutional practice that served to organize the politico-religious acts that clearly framed the limits of the Empty See (*sede vacante*, the period that separates the death of a pope from the election of his successor) and more popular observances destined for the crowds of the Catholic faithful. I will presently focus on the orchestration of liturgical services and the care of the body of the dead pope. This essay will propose as a starting point an early medieval commonality of services for both popes and cardinals. This original unity splintered with the gradual separation distinguishing the ritual of the pope's funeral service from that of others, accompanied by a distinctive care attached to his body, which certainly objectified and iconicized it. Lastly, cardinal and papal funeral services met again in the rites of the later Middle Ages. This chapter will end with a close reading of various cardinals' wills and testaments witnessing to their personal conceptualization of their own deaths.

In his recent book, *Morte e elezione del papa: Norme, riti e conflitti*, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani discusses the death of the pope and specifies the requirements of an honorable burial. The *Liber Pontificalis* included descriptions of a three-day novena said, according to Paravicini Bagliani, to legitimate the election of a rightful successor.⁶ Ceremonial books of the mid-twelfth century prescribed that cardinals convene three times after the death of the pope: for his death and burial, the day after (for the Mass for the Dead), and on the third day to discuss the forthcoming election (after the Mass of the Holy Spirit). Expectations rested on a somewhat quick burial of the pope after his passing. In fact, the development of a legitimating tradition went hand in hand with the definition and elaboration of an orderly ritual that included burial and election and lengthened the span of time that separated death from burial.

The insistence found in the *Liber Pontificalis* on the honor due to the dead pope became a topos linked to the growing prestige of the papal office, and a means of controlling the processes of succession. This is also seen in *The Pope's Body*, where Paravicini Bagliani inscribes the death of the pope within a dialectic of caducity and glorification.⁷ But it was Ernst Kantorowicz who articulated first the dual nature of the medieval king's body and of the monarchical institution: the king's body was destined to perish while his institutional body endured in his kingdom. Similarly, the pope died but the ecclesiastical institution persevered.⁸ This similarity may be seen further in the detailed itineraries, for example, that describe the transport of the pope's body from the place of his death to the location of his burial. The

6 It should be noted that the discussion on death is minimal; in the case of Leo IX the author only mentions that the pope was buried "truly" (*vero*) in St. Peter's Basilica; see Louis Duchesne, *Le Liber pontificalis: Texte, traduction et commentaire* (Paris: de Boccard, 1955), 2:275.

7 Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *The Pope's Body*, trans. D.S. Peterson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

8 For a full discussion, see Rollo-Koster, *Raiding Saint Peter*, 20–21; and Ernst Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae: A Study in Liturgical Acclamations and Mediaeval Worship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946), and *The King's Two Bodies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

development of a decorous papal send-off honored the humanity and caducity of the dead pope; but it also represented the continued longevity of the institution in consensus-building practices.

In 1274, Pope Gregory X's bull *Ubi periculum* defined the conclave (a safe and secretive space where cardinals focused solely on an unencumbered papal election), and lengthened the interval between death and burial to allow for the arrival of absent cardinals, and for the preparations of the cardinals' quarters within the conclave. When he decreed, "With the approval of the sacred council, we decree that if the pope dies in a city where he was residing with his curia, the cardinals present in that city are obliged to await the absent cardinals, but for ten days only," Gregory created the *novendiales*, or novena, the nine days of observance.⁹ Following Byzantine imperial tradition, the pope's body was exhibited to the public. In this way, the crowds could testify to the pope's death. Viewing the corpse with visage uncovered, they looked upon the human face of the ecclesiastical institution as it were, as the attending cardinal electors attested to the continuity of the Church. Thus *novendiales* and honorific burial linked the maintenance of the ecclesiastical body with the demise of the physical body of the pope.¹⁰

In general, knowledge of medieval ecclesiastical funerary practices comes partly from ceremonial books called *ordines*. While they existed throughout the early Middle Ages, it was the *ordines romani* which centered on the liturgy of the great Roman churches.¹¹ During the 1140s the expansion of papal authority stimulated better recording of liturgical practices, a movement that lasted throughout the later Middle Ages. But twelfth-century texts became the foundation of these subsequent documents and earlier practices were preserved and incorporated in future editions. Of course, *ordines* are prescriptive and performative; although other evidence can often corroborate their statements, it should nevertheless be underscored that they offer simply a suggestive indication and not a certainty of what might have happened during papal funerals. *Ordines* stipulated the public performance of the important liturgies which were one of the cornerstones of ecclesiastical authority. Rites were an important instrument for the ideological formation and indoctrination of the faithful and they set the terms for the complex negotiation of power relations.

Michel Andrieu has identified and edited the various services dedicated to papal and cardinal funerals in use throughout the Middle Ages. All in all, from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, the various *ordines* followed a well-defined track with the most recent iteration usually reproducing rites and language found in its predecessor. One of the oldest *ordines* is the tenth-century Romano-German *Obsequium circa morientes* (Homage to the dead). This Romano-German *ordo* is easily accessible thanks to Cyrille Vogel and Reinhard Elze's edition, completed with notes left by

9 For a detailed discussion of "*Ubi periculum*," see Rollo-Koster, *Raiding Saint Peter*, 94–100. The text of the bull is available in Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 1:314–322.

10 Paravicini Bagliani, *Morte e elezione del papa*, 215–226.

11 See Michel Andrieu, *Les ordines romani du haut Moyen Âge* (Louvain: "Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense" bureaux, 1931).

Michel Andrieu.¹² This *ordo* in turn influenced that of the twelfth century, which led eventually to the thirteenth-century *Ordo sepeliendi clericos romane fraternitatis* (Liturgy for the dead of the Roman clergy).¹³

By the central Middle Ages popes and cardinals were buried according to a liturgy closely tied to the Roman clergy – the so-called *Ordo sepeliendi clericos romane fraternitatis*. Ceremonies began with a night call of all Roman clerics who were required to participate in a vigil in the church where the deceased was to be buried, while bishops or cardinals celebrated masses for the dead. The *Ordo sepeliendi clericos romane fraternitatis* then detailed closely the order of the ritual and the prayers, homilies, and antiphons to be sung or recited throughout the service.¹⁴

Cardinal Stefaneschi, who wrote one of the most thorough *ordines* some time between 1300 and his death in 1341, clarified the *Ordo sepeliendi clericos romane fraternitatis*. He also described rites attached to the election, coronation, and consecration of the pope, the papal and cardinal calendrical liturgy from Christmas to Pentecost, papal masses, sermons, anniversary celebrations, consistories, councils, imperial and royal coronations, canonizations, cardinals' elevations and funerals, ecclesiastical transfers, and the charges of nuncios and legates.¹⁵ As evidenced in the title of his section, *Ordo romane ecclesie ad sepeliendum papam, episcopos, presbiteros et diacones cardinales defunctos* (Roman liturgy for the burial of the pope, and cardinals-bishops, priests, and deacons), Stefaneschi did not isolate the pope's obsequies from those of the cardinals.¹⁶ Both were treated in common, and the author did not stipulate a distinct liturgy for the pope. He copied the *Ordo sepeliendi clericos romane fraternitatis* when describing the three absolutions officiated by the four cardinals who stood around the corpse. The editor of the *ordo*, Marc Dykmans, feels compelled to add that the service resembled funerals as practiced in many churches, with formulas that remained largely common for various members of society.¹⁷

Nothing yet clearly distinguished the papal service from the rite for cardinals. The cardinals who surrounded the pope's body stood in a specific order with the first cardinal in dignity (cardinal bishop or priest) to the right shoulder of the

12 Chapter CXLIX, "In nomine domini incipit obsequium circa morientes, vel qualiter agatur circa infirmum morte detentum," details the service; Chapter CL: "Missa in die depositionis defuncti," the funeral mass; chapter CLI, the mass of the dead; and Chapter CLII, the service at the cemetery, in Cyrille Vogel and Reinhard Elze, *Le pontifical romano-germanique du dixième siècle* (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, 1963), 2:281–310.

13 This funeral service appears in volume one of *Le pontifical romain au Moyen-Âge*. See chapter LI A., "In officio sepulturae," and chapter LI B., "Ordo commendationis animae et officium sepulturae," followed by the various benedictions at cemeteries in Michel Andrieu, *Le pontifical romain au Moyen-Âge: Tome 1. Le pontifical romain du xii siècle* (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, 1938), 277–288.

14 Michel Andrieu, *Le pontifical romain au Moyen-Âge: Tome 2. Le pontifical de la curie romaine au xiii siècle* (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, 1940), 505–513.

15 Marc Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Tome II. De Rome en Avignon ou le cérémonial de Jacques Stefaneschi* (Brussels: Institut historique belge de Rome, 1981).

16 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal: Jacques Stefaneschi*, 503–507.

17 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal: Jacques Stefaneschi*, 248.

corpse, the second to his left foot, the third to his right foot, and the fourth to his left shoulder. The four cardinals incensed the body and altar, and recited the prayers. The ritual completed, three of the cardinals returned to the sacristy and took off their vestments while their senior (the cardinal-bishop who had officiated at the mass) accompanied the body to its final resting place, as clergy sang the antiphon *In paradisum*. Once at the place of burial all prayed, “*Deus qui fundasti ... vera resuscitatio, prestante eodem.*” The burial closed with antiphons, psalms, and prayer. Some other final prayers were recited or sung while returning to the church, especially the seven penitential psalms, and the absolution “*Absolve, Domine, quesumus ... pietatis absterge. Per ...*”

In only one instance did Stefaneschi distinguish the papal service from that of the cardinals. The very last among the prayers points implicitly to a pope's funeral, with its recommendation to the “*Deus qui apostolum ... vicem respiciat. Qui vivis ...*” which happened to also be the third prayer of the papal coronation.¹⁸ In this last section, Stefaneschi repeated the formula that had been employed in Lyon by the Bishop of Ostia (the papal consecrator) for the coronations of popes Clement V and John XXII (on November 15, 1305, and September 5, 1316, respectively).¹⁹

Here the symbolism was striking. The man who had stood while receiving his consecration was now no more than a corpse, lowered into his grave.²⁰ But death did not challenge the pope's worthiness: elevated in life, he was exalted also in death. The same words that had raised him above mere humanity in life now ushered him into eternal life. As the man stood above all others, so did the institution that he symbolized. Eternity had been reached for both man and Church.

The first explicitly papal funerary ceremonials were the *ordines* of François de Conzié and Pierre Ameil, both contemporary with the Great Western Schism (1378–1417).²¹ Since I have discussed the details of these *ordines* elsewhere I will

18 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal: Jacques Stefaneschi*, 503–507.

19 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal: Jacques Stefaneschi*, 289, “11. *Tertiam orationem dat episcopus Ostiensis dicens: Deus qui apostolum tuum Petrum inter ceteros coapostolos primum tenere voluisti, eique universe christianitatis molem superimposuisti, respice propitius, quesumus, hunc famulum tuum Clementem quem de humili cathedra violenter sublatum in thronum eiusdem apostolorum principis sublimamus, ut sicut profectibus tante dignitatis augetur, ita virtutum meritis cumuletur, quatenus ecclesiastice universitatis onus, te adiuvante, digne ferat, et a te, qui es beatitudo tuorum, meritam vicem recipiat. Qui vivis et.*” The formula for John XXII was altered with the elimination of his name, instead an “N” was left as marker; see “8. *Tertiam dicit episcopus Ostiensis, scilicet: Oratio. Deus qui apostolum tuum Petrum inter ceteros coapostolos primum tenere voluisti, eique universe christianitatis molem superimposuisti, respice propitius, quesumus, hunc famulum tuum N., quem de humili cathedra violenter sublatum in thronum eiusdem apostolorum principis sublimamus, ut sicut profectibus tante dignitatis augetur, ita virtutum meritis cumuletur, quatenus ecclesiastice universitatis onus te adiuvante digne ferat, et a te, qui es beatitudo tuorum, meritam vicem recipiat. Qui vivis,*” Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal: Jacques Stefaneschi*, 294.

20 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal: Jacques Stefaneschi*, 294, “*Sciendum est tamen quod quando dicte orationes dicuntur, dominus papa non sedebat sed stabat, et sine mitra.*”

21 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Les textes avignonnais jusqu'à la fin du grand schisme d'occident* (Bruxelles: Institut historique belge de Rome, 1983), and *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Le retour à Rome ou le cérémonial du patriarche Pierre Ameil* (Bruxelles: Institut historique belge de Rome, 1985), 216–233.

focus here solely on items specific to the care of the pope's body and liturgy rather than the articles pertaining to the ecclesiastical institution.²² François de Conzié was named camerlengo of the pope by Clement VII in 1383 and kept the title until his death on December 31, 1431. A skilled administrator, he served a varied obedience during the Great Western Schism: first with Clement VII and Benedict XIII, and continuing after 1409 with the Pisan-elected popes Alexander V and his successor John XXIII, ending his career with Martin V, elected at the Council of Constance in 1417. His ceremonial, the earliest concerned with the pope's funeral and the Empty See coincides with one of the most turbulent vacancies in papal history, the one that led to the Great Western Schism (1378–1417), and the division of the church between two popes, two courts, and two obediences. It is possible that his preoccupation with the Schism dictated some of his rubrics. As De Conzié was penning his ceremonial for the Avignon pope, his contemporary, the Patriarch of Grado, Pierre Ameil, was similarly penning one for the Roman Pope Urban VI to whom he had remained faithful.²³

Ironically, both authors' objectives appear in their closing paragraphs; one ends with death, while the other highlights renewal. Ameil terminates his *ordo* with the rubric concerning the conclave and a few historical notes on the deaths of popes Gregory XI and Urban VI, noting the exact placement of the candles that adorned the latter pope's coffin, a focus suggesting his attachment to the person of the deceased pope. De Conzié closes with the papal *adventus* and the coronation ceremonies of the newly elected; in this way, perhaps he avers the continuity of the papal institution. Despite their differences, both authors employ similar language. They concur in their description of the inventory of the papal treasury, funeral arrangements, funerary procession, catafalque's description, novena masses, meals taken at the Vatican, alms, conclave preparation, and the distribution of mourning cloths.

With the exceptions noted above, the meticulous *ordo* of François de Conzié at Avignon was unmatched in Rome.²⁴ Pierre Ameil's *ordo* covered the death of the pope, but his institutional approach lacked the minutiae of de Conzié's treatment. Still, Ameil outdid de Conzié in his focus on the pope's body and the care it demanded, prescribing appropriate behavior during the pope's agony, notes concerning embalming, rubrics for the exposition of the corpse, and transport to the chapel, a detailed agenda that de Conzié neglected. The papal camerlengo, de Conzié underscored the heightened position of his own office during the Empty See. As the cardinals' functions did not cease with the pope's death but were enlarged, so the camerlengo exercised special responsibilities during an interregnum. De Conzié emphasized that the College of Cardinals' sole preoccupation was the conclave and the election of the future pope, not the running of government. It is the

22 I discussed the detail of these *ordines* in my *Raiding Saint Peter*, 44–59. To date, they have been used mainly by Paravicini Bagliani, *The Pope's Body*, and *Morte*, 226–251.

23 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Pierre Ameil*, 216–233.

24 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Les textes avignonnais jusqu'à la fin du grand schisme d'occident*, 1:47–61, 262–335.

camerlengo's leadership that assured institutional continuity in the life of the church. He headed the Apostolic Chamber that ran the temporal administration of the church during the interregnum, and he also assumed liturgical functions.

De Conzié opened his discussion of a papal advent by regulating protocol for the final hours of the pope. The first cardinal-bishop usually offered Extreme Unction, but if death arrived too quickly then the next available best-qualified person did the task. If he were still able, the pope called his cardinals to his side, recommended his soul to their prayers, and pardoned them. In turn, they forgave him whatever ill he had committed willingly or unwillingly. Then the pope uttered his profession of faith and retracted any theological errors he might have made in his lectures, teaching, and sermons. The pope then bid the cardinal-electors to choose his successor wisely, based solely on their faith and divine inspiration. Once the pope died, the camerlengo and various chamberlains (*cubicularii*) took over. Chamberlains washed and readied the pope's body while the camerlengo locked away silver and gold wares, bullion, jewelry, liturgical books, and ornaments. Pillaging papal goods was a well-established tradition by the fourteenth century and de Conzié anticipated trouble.²⁵ He then ordered the closing and securing of all the gates of the papal palace, allowing only a single one to remain open for communication.

Ameil's *ordo* followed the identical plan of de Conzié, from the pope's final agony to the securing of papal goods.²⁶ Ameil designated the camerlengo, penitentiaries, and cardinals responsible for all administrative and ritual tasks.²⁷ Still Ameil was more interested than de Conzié in the care surrounding the ailing pope and his corpse. Ameil advises that the physicians attending the pope should forewarn his confessors of his impending death so that they might help him to prepare spiritually. The camerlengo was to summon the cardinals to the pope's bedside some two or three days before the end (*sic!*) to witness the pope's drafting of his last will and testament, to choose his burial site, and to enjoin the cardinals with several recommendations including repaying the church's debt. He was to bless them before they withdrew.

Once left with his small group of familiars, the pope received the Final Anointing and the camerlengo and chamberlains secured all his goods. The pope then confessed, received the Eucharist, and petitioned an indulgence *in mortis articulo* (at the point of death). Ameil then moved to a detailed account of the body's preparation for burial.

Embalming and elaborately dressing the body, processing the corpse in public, the spectacle of its exposition to the faithful, all demonstrate a certain

25 This is the topic of my *Raiding Saint Peter* and "Episcopal and Papal Vacancies: A Long History of Violence," in *Ecclesia et Violentia: Violence against the Church and Violence within the Church in the Middle Ages*, ed. Radosław Kotecki and Jacek Maciejewski (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 54–71.

26 "*Tunc camerarius sit advisatus quatenus recolligi faciat omnia bona pape ad certum locum et securum propter insultum*," Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Pierre Ameil*, 218.

27 Paravicini Bagliani, *Morte*, 226–233.

objectification of the pope's remains. Once embalmed, the pope became a formerly living creature now transfigured, a simulacrum that was prepared, dressed, paraded, venerated; just as the statues of saints were celebrated on their feast days but later returned to their niches. It is highly possible that as pre-modern societies personalized images and ascribed a vitality to them that they did not in fact possess (for example, sacred images saw, felt, and cried), the faithful could easily conceptualize and rationalize a similar – yet reversed – process. The embalmed body of a dead pope became “a personalized object,” a sacramental icon that mediated the powerful presence of the divine through human likeness.²⁸ This permutation or reversed transfiguration may have been facilitated by the embalmed pope's likeness in death to the familiar wax *ex-votos* that adorned shrines throughout Europe.²⁹ Objectification may also have been advanced by the common late medieval practice of dressing statues in priestly vestments. As we will see shortly, the dead pope's body wore a pallium “borrowed” from the body (a statue?) of St. Peter. The deceased pope thus became transfigured in death, a miraculous image that was also veiled and unveiled, accessible and inaccessible, as his body traveled from private chamber to public exposition and finally to his tomb. Even the staging of his body, on a bier and catafalque reminded the audience of the tabernacle that contained their most sacred icons and relics. This ritualized iconicization may explain why in the early modern period the permutation of man, image, and office became complete and crowds attacked a dead pope's statues and effigies when he died.³⁰

The preparation and dressing of the corpse took place in the secret/private chamber of the pope.³¹ As the penitentiaries recited the Office of the Dead, the seven penitential psalms, and other prayers contained in their books, brothers of the Bull (seal) Office or of the papal almshouse washed the pope's body with warm scented water, “*cum aqua calida cum bonis herbis*,” and a barber shaved his head and beard, “*barbitonsor radat sibi caput et barbam*.”³² The brothers and an apothecary filled his

28 On the treatment of images as persons, see Megan Holmes, “Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence,” *Art History* 34 (2011): 432–465; Steven Stowell, *The Spiritual Language of Art: Medieval Christian Themes in Writings on Art of the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 172. On art making an image alive, see Stephen J. Campbell, “‘Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva’: Michelangelo, Rosso, and the (Un)Divinity of Art,” *The Art Bulletin* 84 (2002): 596–620; and the self-explanatory Richard C. Trexler, “Dressing and Undressing Images: An Analytic Sketch,” in *Religion in Social Context in Europe and America* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 374–408.

29 See Megan Holmes, “Ex-votos: Materiality, Memory, and Cult,” in *The Idol in the Age of Art: Objects, Devotions and the Early Modern World*, ed. Michael Wayne Cole and Rebecca Zorach (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 159–181.

30 See Sergio Bertelli, *The King's Body: Sacred Rituals of Power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, trans. R. Burr Lichfield (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 2001), 246–248; Karen J. Lloyd, “Bernini and the Vacant See,” *The Burlington Magazine* 150 (2008): 821–824.

31 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Pierre Ameil*, 220, “*Lavatur enim in camera secreta, et induitur sacris vestibus, prout est dictum*.”

32 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Pierre Ameil*, 218.

anus, mouth, ears, and nose with cotton, oakum, or myrrh, incense, or aloe if available, “*apothecarius et dicti fratres de bulla obturent sibi bene omnia foramina cum bumbasio vel stupa, anum, os, aures, nares, cum myrra, thure, et aloe, si possit habere,*” then they once again rubbed the body with a good white wine heated with smelling herbs, and with a good Garnache wine provided by a chamberlain or butler “*lavetur etiam corpus cum bono vino albo et calefacto cum herbis odoriferis, et cum bona vernagia, que cubicularii vel buticularii pape debent dictis lavatoribus administrare.*”³³ The next step included stuffing the throat with herbs, spices, and cotton, his nostrils with muscade, rubbing the body vigorously, including the hands, and anointing it for one last time with a good balsam provided by the camerlengo, “*Guttur vero impletur de aromatibus et speciebus cum bombasio, et etiam nares cum musqueto. Ultimo etiam totum corpus multum fricetur et ungatur cum balsamo bono, et etiam manus.*”³⁴

This particular preparation of the corpse also reinforced what Paravicini Bagliani called “the dialectic between caducity and eternity.” Still, filling the throat with cotton and spices can be interpreted symbolically as silencing the papal voice (even though I surmise its practical significance was to prevent foul odors from escaping the decaying body and offending the noses of mourners). But if human words were silenced, the pope’s words were not; they retained their authority, echoing indeed eternally, enshrined in ecclesiastical records and archives.

Discussing the embalming of popes, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani finds the first reference to this custom in the life of Pope Pascal II who died in 1118 after a lengthy reign; but after him, two centuries of silence follow. The next evidence occurs in a book that describes the customs of the later thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries and discussed the role of the almoner in the papal obsequies. He was charged with the preparation of the pope’s body and dressed him according to custom after receiving papal regalia from the penitentiary. As a somewhat dubious reward for these intimate services, the almoner was to receive the bed in which the pope had died. Custom prevented the cutting or portioning of the pope’s body to preserve it, and we can note that Ameil’s description is far less invasive than procedures described in contemporary sources.³⁵

33 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Pierre Ameil*, 219.

34 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Pierre Ameil*, 219. Again the argument of reverse transfiguration can be brought forth. Discussing “culturally specific conceptions of anthropomorphism and embodiment,” Megan Holmes adds: “Late medieval and Renaissance theories of human physiology were extremely attentive to how inner, vital spirits manifest themselves on the exterior physiognomy and passed out of (and into) the body through critical orifices.” See also Holmes, “Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence,” 452. Thus, it could be argued that closing these orifices dehumanized and objectified the dead.

35 Boniface VIII’s bull *Detestande feritatis* (also known as *de Sepulturis*), issued on September 27, 1299 prevented the cutting or portioning of the body for preservation. Embalming was supposed to maintain the integrity of the corpse. Boniface denounced all those who required to be disemboweled, boiled, and partitioned to be interred somewhere else than where they had died. He favored a local burial with later exhumation and transport to the final burial place, once the body had decomposed. See for example, Elizabeth A. Brown, “Death and the Human Body in the Later Middle Ages: The

The better-known description of embalming comes from the famed fourteenth-century physician, Guy de Chauliac. In his recommendation for the care of a dead body (his *regimen custodie corporum mortuorum*) de Chauliac distinguishes a “clean” embalming practice better fitted for cold seasons and bodies that are skinny and dry, from a more invasive one, appropriate for fat bodies. He lists Rhazes (a Persian physician) as his main source and an apothecary of the pope who had embalmed several popes (*ut dicebat Jacobus apothecarius qui multos Romanos pontifices preparaverat*), who can only be Jacopo Migliorini, well known by historians of papal Avignon.³⁶ De Chauliac’s embalming aimed at preventing the corpse’s decomposition for at least eight days. Piero Argellata, a famed surgeon at the University of Bologna confirmed this estimation when he prided himself on having prepared Alexander V’s body so expertly that he lasted eight days. This was certainly an accomplishment, since Alexander V, who had died in Bologna in 1410, was left with his face, hands, and feet exposed and visible.³⁷

Once prepared, penitentiaries then dressed the body with trousers (*bracas*), shirt (*camisiam*), hose (*caligas*), and a tunic (*tunicam*). They arranged the corpse “as if sitting” (*quasi sedendo*) and covered him in his red papal garments (*sacris vestibus rubei coloris*) that included first his white sandals (*sandaliis albis*), belt and cincture (*cinctorio et subcinctorio*), fanon (*fano*), stole (*stola*), short tunic (*tinucella*), maniple (*manipulo*), dalmatic (*dalmatica*), gloves (*cirothecis*), chasuble (*planeta*), and a pallium borrowed from the body of St. Peter (*pallio de corpore Petri sumpto*); they folded the fanon on his head and around his shoulders as if he were going to officiate and they put on his head his white biretta and miter without pearls or gold “*et plicent fanum super caput, et circa scapulas circumdent, ac si deberet celebrare, et ponant in capite eius biretam albam cum mitra alba sine perlus et sine auro.*”³⁸

Some historians have argued that moving the pope’s body into a sitting position while dressing him indicated that the pope was carried to the chapel in a sitting position, a custom attested in the ritual of the Byzantine patriarchal funeral.³⁹ In a recent article, Michail A. Bojcov follows the historiography of this practice, noting

Legislation of Boniface VIII on the Division of the Corpse,” *Viator* 12 (1981): 221–270. Paravicini Bagliani suggests that specialists who were not necessarily clerics performed internal embalming on the pope’s body. This specifically allowed specialist laymen to participate in the pope’s funerary rites; see Paravicini-Bagliani, *The Pope’s Body*, 306.

36 Joëlle Rollo-Koster, *The People of Curial Avignon: A Critical Edition of the Liber Divisionis and the Matriculae of Notre Dame la Majour* (Lampeter, UK, and Lewinston, USA: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 91, 139, 165, 330–331; and Anne-Marie Hayez, *Le terrier avignonnais de l’évêque Anglic Grimoard (1366–1368)* (Paris: ECTHS, 1993), 156.

37 Paravicini Bagliani, *Morte*, 240–241. Traditionally the face of the pope was covered when exposed in the chapel, uncovered for the public display in the church, and covered when he lay on his bier.

38 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Le retour à Rome ou le cérémonial du patriarche Pierre Ameil*, 219.

39 “*Tunc quasi sedendo erigant eum dicti penitentiarii, et induant ipsum totaliter sacris vestibus rubei coloris.*” Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Pierre Ameil*, 218.

discussion in the work of Ludwig Ruland, Rudolf Meyer, Wolfgang Brückner, and Ralph Giesey, who all asserted that the dead pope was propped up on a chair during the *novendiales*. But Bojcov clearly debunks this somewhat spectral reading of the evidence. Using Ameil as a source, his research suggests that the pope, once dressed, reclined with a pillow under his head and feet.⁴⁰ As Ameil underscores, the cross found on the pallium was held by three pins, as customary, and the pope was laid on a bier over a mattress covered with red silk and gold cloth, the pope's head and feet resting on pillows covered with silk and gold.⁴¹

If we return to traditional ceremonial, Ameil's next rubric details how penitentiaries transported the body from the papal chamber to the chapel, preceded by sub-deacons and cantors who sang the "*Subvenite sancti Dei.*" Indicating the participation of layfolk in the papal funerals, nobles, squires, or the pope's personal guard (*clientes armorum*; or if none were present, his messengers) carried at least 25 torches. The papal household, and the regular and secular clergy of the city accompanied the litter. During the night, penitentiaries watched the body while staff renewed the stock of wax and candles. Finally, once the papal body had left the apartments, the camerlengo retrieved the keys and drafted a written inventory of the late pope's goods: with the help of three cardinals, they rechecked the inventory or requested better accuracy by calling in the clerks of the Chamber as additional witnesses.⁴² They might also request copies of the inventory for their own records.

Ameil recommends providing several additional altars in the Grand and Small Chapels for the celebration of masses *pro anima pape* (for the soul of the pope). To ensure an appropriately somber mourning, the treasurer and camerlengo were to distribute to the papal staff lengths of black cloth for the making of mourning clothes. The members of the household wore black during the funeral procession that transported the pope to the chapel, led by a sub-deacon who carried the cross before the papal bier. All others followed in pairs behind, led by the camerlengo

40 Michail A. Bojcov, "Der tote Papst im Sessel und andere Gespenster," in *Papst Johannes XXII: Konzepte und Verfahren seines Pontifikats*, ed. Hans-Joachim Schmidt and Martin Rohde (Berlin, Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 501–535.

41 "Ipso vero sic parato, dicti penitentiarii ponant eum super feretrum novum vel lectica, in quo debet esse bonum matalacium coopertum de serico rubeo cum una pulcra vona seu coopertorio etiam de serico rubeo, et desuper debent esse duo panni de auro se tenentes. [...] Item subtus caput eius sit pulvinar coopertum de panno aureo. Et post pedes eius in eodem feretro aliud pulvinar consimile cum floxis de serico et cordonibus de auro super quod debent stare duo capelli seu pilei pape. Pulvinaria debent esse latitudinis feretri." Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Pierre Ameil*, 219–220.

42 "Item notandum quod immediate dum corpus extra cameram fuerit, camerarius debet recipere omnes claves cubiculariorum camera pape, et debet vocare tres priores cardinales, scilicet episcoporum, presbiterorum et diaconorum, et eis assignare omnia iocalia pape, et inventaria solum in scriptis, et dare eis copiam omnium, si petierint. Quod si vellent videre omnia oculata fide, eis non contradicat, sed faciant omnia inventaria renovari in presentia camerarii et clericorum camere, ita quod quilibet ipsorum trium habeat copiam, et dictus camerarius aliam, et dicti clerici aliam, ne fraus possit esse." Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Pierre Ameil*, 221.

who wore black, red, or green according to his cardinalate status. During the ceremony, the catafalque (*castrum doloris*) was brilliantly illuminated by the glow of 200 torches and candles lit before the ceremony. The novena was conducted by the clergy, while around the silk-covered catafalque emblazoned with the arms of the pope, candles and torches burned. But sometimes during the *novendiales*, lights were dimmed when cardinals officiated and preached sermons.⁴³

When his responsibilities to prepare the pope's body had been discharged, the camerlengo wrote to absent cardinals announcing the death and recalled them to the court. Meanwhile the vice-chancellor dealt with the destruction of the papal seal or bull (from the Latin *bullā*). Since the College of Cardinals was gathered to witness this important act that officially ended the public authority of the deceased, they also dealt with the organization of the funeral. They set its date and named celebrants. Burial was expected within the *novendiales*, before entry into conclave. If the pope had left no specific instructions, cardinals decided on the location of the burial. They also planned the challenging liturgical logistics, like securing quantities of wax lights – the required 300 tapers for the funeral, 50 for the novena, and 100 for the novena's last day.

On the day of the funeral, auditors of the Chamber and papal chaplains carried the pope's body into the church preceded by the camerlengo, holding the edge of the shroud. All other prelates and the cardinals' personnel followed the body, following the same usage that regulated cardinals' funerals. Once inside the church, cardinal-bishops or cardinal-priests celebrated the funeral mass. Each day of the novena, the camerlengo chose the celebrant (patriarch, archbishop, or bishop) of the second office that followed the cardinal's mass. Although the cardinals were allowed to leave at the end of their mass, the entire court was expected to remain until the end of the second mass.

In his study of the rites surrounding the pope's death, Paravicini Bagliani identifies three singularized spaces in Ameil's ordo: the papal chamber, the chapel and the church. The pope uttered his last words and spent his last moment in his private chamber; it is there that his body was prepared and dressed. The chapel was a semi-public location for the exposition of the body to visitors and the location of the vigil of curialists and other religious. Lastly, the church was the public space of the funeral. During the *novendiales*, two processions moved the body from chamber to chapel and chapel to church.⁴⁴

Throughout the proceedings charity was distributed to the city's convents and religious orders and alms to the local poor.⁴⁵ Ameil adds some miscellaneous details

43 "Sed facta absolutione omnia luminaria extinguantur, et tunc fiat sermo." Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance*: Pierre Ameil, 223.

44 Paravicini Bagliani, *Morte*, 240–248.

45 "Item statim fiunt magne elemosine pro anima pape per thesaurarium de mandato camerarii. Primo dat quatuor ordinibus mendicantibus equaliter quinquaginta florenos vel viginti quinque. Ad minus decem florenos panem, carnes et vinum pro una die. Deinde hospitalibus et aliis pauperibus, iuxta voluntatem camerarii et secundum quod camera est potens." Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance*: Pierre Ameil, 226.

suggesting that disputes over the ownership of the deceased pope's personal property were not uncommon: the pope's barber could not retain the pope's shaving implements, and stewards could not keep the papal tablecloths and barrels, "because they were paid." Adding real to symbolic value, Ameil adds that they could only keep for themselves the items used when the pope took his last meal – but only if the servants had not received their wages. Chamberlains, however, could request a papal garment.⁴⁶ Ameil ends this discussion of the pope's funeral with a very detailed census listing those who were to receive black cloth for mourning clothes. Regardless of the liturgical calendar, the pope was buried in his red pontifical habit. Cardinals wore black or dark-colored coats lined with fur, while the pope's kin and those he had raised to their positions wore the dark blue coats of mourning. Mourning clothes established a definite hierarchy among those who followed the bier. Holders of perpetual offices who served the church (and not the pope) did not wear mourning garments; those who lost their offices with the death of the pope were marked by their somber clothes furnished by the Apostolic Chamber.⁴⁷

Pierre Ameil distinguished papal funerals from those of the cardinals, as he treated the separate liturgies specific to each.⁴⁸ Yet it is significant that in some features the pope's funeral service corresponded to that of the cardinals. Significant too is the fact that Ameil decided to re-script (in some minor details) the cardinals' funerals, perhaps demonstrating their growing importance at the court. The splendor of the cardinals' funerals was undeniable. While lying in state on a bier lit by many tapers, a cardinal's body was covered with a golden cloth emblazoned by his coat of arms, ornamented with black fringe. Ameil recommends at least 100 torches or more, depending on the wishes of the deceased.

The dead cardinal was dressed according to his ecclesiastical rank in life. Thus cardinal-deacons wore a tunic, simple gloves, and a plain ring while cardinal-bishops and priests wore their sacred vestments, in black or purple, a white miter, episcopal gloves, bishop's ring, and sandals. Another cardinal always officiated at the funeral mass. The ceremonies included a sermon pronounced by an ecclesiastical peer, whom Ameil required to be a Master in Theology. Notably, Ameil prohibited the giving of a special benediction or indulgence during the sermon.⁴⁹ After the sermon, cardinals surrounded the coffin (*domus fustea, castrum doloris* is used both for the pope and cardinals' caskets) while cantors sang the *Libera me Domine*. Ameil also

46 "Item sciendum quod barbitonsor pape non retinet cassam cum rasoribus et cum hiis que intra sunt; item de bacili argenteo. Postea novus papa facit sibi dare x vel xii florenos. Verumtamen bacile semper in camera pape cum rasoriis et tobaliolis remanet [...]. Item si paneterii et buticularii petunt tobaleas vel bottas, nihil detur eis, quia habent gagia sua. Quod si non darentur eis, rationem haberent petendi in tobaleis in quibus papa ultimo comedit. et in bottis de 25 quibus tune ultimo bibebat vinum." Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance*: Pierre Ameil, 227.

47 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance*: Pierre Ameil, 224–225.

48 Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance*: Pierre Ameil, 247–250.

49 "In dicto sermone non datur benedictio nec indulgentia." Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance*: Pierre Ameil, 249.

identifies the exact moment when prayers were uttered and liturgical chants sung. The cardinal who officiated blessed the coffin with holy water while reciting the *Pater noster*. The cardinal's household remained seated, below the coffin. As in a papal funeral, the cardinal's body lay on a catafalque with a pillow under his head and feet, and other cushions supported other hats indicating his rank. As with a deceased pope, the burial of cardinals took place nine days after death.⁵⁰ This is revelatory of the cardinals' understanding of the dignity of their office. No conclave followed their death, so the practical need for nine days of mourning was absent yet they still mimicked the papal ritual equating their status with the pope's: after all, some cardinals indeed became pope. The cardinal's household wore mourning clothes (like the pope's *familia* who lost their office with the pope's death).⁵¹ Based on Emile Mâle's reconstruction, Guillaume Mollat assumes that the funerary garb comprised a long, oversize black cape.⁵²

According to the customs of the time, during their *novendiales* cardinals also commissioned many masses from various secular and religious orders. In addition, some cardinals ordered the ringing of church bells. In Avignon Cardinal Guillaume Sudre ordered the bells of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame des Doms to ring for his death, burial, and during the novena.⁵³ Cardinals also required a cortège of up to 100 followers, dressed in black and carrying torches to accompany their bodies from their residence to the church.⁵⁴ Generally, the body remained exposed either at the cardinal's former residence or in a chapel.

Cardinals varied in the ostentation of their funerals; some, like Pierre de Cros, Jean de Dormans, Pierre Bertrand de Colombiers or Guillaume Sudre, somewhat restricted the pomp and luxury of the affair. They asked to be buried in simple garb, reduced the size of the funeral cortège to a few poor, reduced the amount of candles and tapers, prohibited mourning clothes and lamentations, or prohibited the sounding of the death knell.⁵⁵ Still, ostentatious mourning must have been

50 "Item volumus et ordinamus quod in die obitus nostri fiant vigilie, prout pro dominis cardinalibus est fieri consuetum." Baluze, *Vitae*, 4:320; and, "Fiant exequie usque ad nonam diem secundum morem et consuetudinem cardinalium decedentium." Pierre Pansier, "Histoire du monastère de Sainte-Praxède d'Avignon," dans *Annales d'Avignon* 4 (1916): 76. See also Guillaume Mollat, "Contribution à l'histoire du Sacré Collège de Clément V à Eugène IV," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 46 (1951): 586.

51 "Familiares nostri de hospitio nostro habeant vestes nigras more solito." Baluze, *Vitae*, vol. 4, 320; and "Omnibus et singulis sociis et familiaribus meis indutis et vestitis raubis nigris ut moris est ... quas quidem dicti socii et familiares mei per totam novenam habeant portare." *ibid.*, 277.

52 Mollat, "Contribution à l'histoire du Sacré Collège," 586.

53 "Ordino quod in pulsationibus que fiunt in ecclesia B. M. de Dominis, nihil [is this mihi or nihil?] expendatur pro obitu meo, nec pro sepultura, nec pro novena." François Du Chesne, *Histoire de tous les cardinaux françois de naissance* (Paris, 1660), 2:626.

54 "Induantur de bonis meis sive executionis mee centum pauperes Christi panno bruno, qui dictum corpus a domo habitationis mee usque ad dictam ecclesiam associant portantes faces sive tortitia cerea in manibus suis ardentes." Baluze, *Vitae*, 4:346; and "Ordinamus quod in die sepulture nostre recipiantur centum pauperes pro portando intorticia, quibus detur eorum cuilibet una tunica de panno nigro." Baluze, *Vitae*, 4:319.

55 Mollat, "Contribution à l'histoire du Sacré Collège," 588.

sometimes tolerated since Pierre Ameil recommends in his ceremonial that cardinals' staff (*familiares*) dressed in deep mourning should arrange themselves around the casket weeping.⁵⁶ Grief so carefully choreographed was not cheap and expenses could run high. For example, Nicolas de Fréauville dedicated 300 florins for his funeral in his 1321 will, while six decades later Pierre de Cros left a substantial 1,000 florins for the event. In both cases costs ran high.⁵⁷

Further expenses could be incurred when cardinals wished to be buried in specific locations, distant from the site of their death. For example, Pierre de la Jugie who died and was temporarily inhumed in Pisa in November 1376 chose Narbonne as his final resting place, while Gil Albornoz who died in Viterbo, Italy in 1367 requested to be buried in Toledo, Spain. In each case executors paid the required wages for reburial.⁵⁸ As a final marker of their status cardinals sometimes requested impressive mausoleums. Guillaume de Chanac who died in Avignon in 1383 and was originally buried in the Dominican convent requested to be moved to the abbey of Saint-Martial in Limoges. He left extremely specific directions for the location of his tomb and further specified in his will that: "I want and order that an honorable alabaster tomb, equal to my rank be built for my remains, with my statue and coat of arms, and any other ornaments necessary so that my relatives and friends, and those that I have known, will think about me when they see it, and will pray to the all-mighty for my soul."⁵⁹

Cardinals and popes considered their death a momentous event. For some, such self-regard was pure conceit, but for others the gravity and dignity of their office was deeply felt. It is this blend of the sacred and the selfish that makes them such a fitting example of medieval mentalities. The 1,352 funeral rites of Clement VI (who, according to his contemporaries, knew how to be pope) cost 2,400 florins, 441 *livres*, 8 *sous*, 8 *deniers* in Avignonese currency, and 7 *livres* 10 *sous* in the new *dementins* (the currency minted by Clement VI). According to Albertus Argentinensis, Clement's body was not embalmed; it had been rubbed with lime to prevent quick putrefaction.⁶⁰ His body remained in a sealed casket at the Cathedral of

56 "Et familiares induti de nigro debent circumquaque sedere prope feretrum flendo." Dykmans, *Le cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la renaissance: Pierre Ameil* 247.

57 See Baluze, *Vitae*, 3:334 for Fréauville and 4:320 for de Cros.

58 Mollat, "Contribution à l'histoire du Sacré Collège," 589–590.

59 "videlicet in arcu a parte dextera juxta majus altare monasterii predicti post cathedras in quibus sedent presbiter, diaconus, et subdiaconus, et ante januam ecclesie ipsius monasterii per quam intratur de ecclesia predicta ante dictum majus altare a parte dextra; et iste arcus est recte ex opposito sepulture bone memorie domini cardinalis Cesaraugustani; voloque et ordino quod in dicto loco fiat pro corpore meo sepulchrum de albastro honestum et decens statui meo cum ymagine et armis meis et aliis necessariis ad finem ut parentes, amici et noti mei ibidem facientes transitum, de me recordantes, altissimo creatori meam habeant animam recommendare." Baluze, *Vitae*, 4:276. Another example could be offered with the Jean de la Grange tomb, see Anne McGee Morganstern, "The La Grange Tomb and Choir: A Monument of the Great Schism of the West," *Speculum* 48 (1973): 52–69.

60 See Baluze, *Vitae*, vol. 1, 288, "Exequie ejus in ecclesia beate Marie Avinionensis fuerunt in crastinum sollenniter celebrate. Et demum exinde corpus ejus, juxta dispositionem ipsius, apud predictum Case Dei monasterium, quod ipse pontifex in ecclesia et domibus ampliavit, et

Notre-Dame des Doms in Avignon until he was brought to the abbey of La Chaise-Dieu in central France. His funeral was an occasion for supporting the poor, the various religious orders of the city, and to reward his staff and the civil servants that had worked for him. The manager of the almshouse of the Pignotte distributed 400 *livres* to local poor, and another 40 were thrown during the cortège that brought the body from the palace to the Cathedral of Notre-Dame des Doms. The four mendicant orders received 40 florins each, other orders 30 florins, and the various almshouses and hospitals a total of 425 florins. The 50 clerics offering requiem masses for his soul during the novena received four *gros* each.

Clement's catafalque was covered in black cloth, surrounded by black covered candelabra and funerary urns. Cloth decorated with the pope's coat of arms draped over the bier; other escutcheons adorned the catafalque. The body stayed three months in the cathedral and on February 28, 1353 his successor Pope Innocent VI paid some 5,000 florins to escort Clement's body to La Chaise-Dieu. The cortège that accompanied Clement to La Chaise-Dieu included Hugues Roger, the late pope's brother, cardinal of San Lorenzo in Damaso; Guillaume de la Jugie, cardinal deacon of Santa Maria in Cosmedin; Nicolas Besse, cardinal of Santa Maria in Via Lata; Clement's nephew Pierre Roger de Beaufort, the future pope Gregory XI, cardinal deacon of Santa Maria Nova; Clement's cousin, Guillaume d'Aigrefeuille, cardinal of Santa Maria in Trastevere; and Count Guillaume Roger de Beaufort, Clement VI's older brother.⁶¹

For historians whose research focuses on the medieval experience of death and mourning, last wills and testaments are important sources witnessing to the individual frame of mind of persons facing their own mortality. Specialized research on this kind of testamentary literature has recently burgeoned and is now considered an integral part of medieval cultural studies.⁶² Still, one caveat remains in the case of clergymen. They were not supposed to write a will to dispose of their goods, since most of their possessions did not belong to them but to the church.

In his study of Anglo-Saxon wills in the early Middle Ages, Michael M. Sheehan traces the dissemination of Roman civil law throughout Europe. He states: "Roman law provided a theory of the testament and its nature, prescribed its forms and the limits of the property with which it might deal, and furnished a jurisprudence for the courts which controlled and enforced it."⁶³ As Roman

capellaniis bene dotavit, et possessionibus augmentavit quampluribus." Eugène Déprez, "Les funérailles de Clément VI et d'Innocent VI d'après les comptes de la cour pontificale," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 20 (1900): 235.

61 Déprez, "Les funérailles de Clément VI et d'Innocent VI," 235–250.

62 See, for example, the article by Francine Michaud in this collection and amongst many other valuable studies, *For the Salvation of my Soul: Women and Wills in Medieval and Early Modern France*, ed. Joëlle Rollo-Koster and Kathryn Reyerson (St. Andrews, UK: St. Andrews Studies in French History and Culture, 2012).

63 Michael M. Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England: From the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to the End of the Thirteenth Century* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), 119.

jurisprudence spread to civil courts it also found its way into canon law, leading to an ecclesiastical definition of the testament. The early church only regulated burial and its income. Gratian, when discussing burial, highlighted the freedom of choosing one's own burial. He quoted Gregory the Great, who left freedom to the testator to choose his burial site.⁶⁴

In 1179 the Council of Lateran III forbade the passing of church property to heirs.⁶⁵ Gregory IX's Decretals reiterated the same point, leaving to testators the possibility of disposing of their patrimonial goods acquired in function of the person (*intuitu personae*). For example, in Book three, section XXVI, On Testaments and Last Wishes, Gregory states in chapter one that a bishop can dispose of his patrimonial goods at wish but not ecclesiastical property (*Episcopus de rebus patrimonialibus testari potest; de rebus vero ecclesiae seu intuitu ecclesiae quaesitis testari non valet*). In chapter seven he reiterates that a clergyman cannot dispose of ecclesiastical property at will while acknowledging the possibility of bequeathing personal property in chapter nine.⁶⁶ Without going into much detail over who wished to claim clerical goods throughout the Middle Ages, and the many attempts by various parties at seizing this property, it is appropriate to mention a solution proposed by the papacy, the *licentia testandi* or testamentary license.⁶⁷ The glosses of Gratian's work clarified the question of testaments. The canon specific to clergymen (*De peculio clericorum*) defined the property of the clergy as usufruct of their benefices for their maintenance while they administered them, but it did not permit ownership of their revenues. They had to distribute their surplus in charitable works.⁶⁸ Eventually glosses recognized the private ownership of certain property, patrimonial goods for example, leading popes to define the *licentia testandi* in order to separate patrimonial from ecclesiastical goods.

In his study of cardinals' wills, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani dates the earliest reference to a cardinal's ability to write a testament to Pietro da Piacenza in 1202.⁶⁹ This date places him close to William of Auxerre's Golden Compendium (*Summa*

64 *Decretum*, Lib. III c. 13 q.2 c. 3–4, “Ubi autem quisque tumulandus sit, legibus expressum non est, et ideo in voluntate tumulandi consistit, unde B. Gregorius ait, ultima voluntas defuncti modis omnibus conservetur.”

65 The council text reads: “15. Although in duties of charity we are especially under obligation to those from whom we know we have received a gift, on the contrary, certain clerics, after receiving many goods from their churches, have presumed to transfer these goods to other uses. We forbid this, knowing that it is also forbidden by ancient canons. Therefore, as we wish to prevent damage to the churches, we order that such goods should remain under the control of the churches, whether the clerics die intestate or wish to bestow them upon others.” At <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/ecum11.htm#canons>. Accessed June 6, 2016.

66 “*De bonis per ecclesiam acquisitis clerici testari non possunt*,” and “*De bonis propriis vel acquisitis intuitu personae clerici testari possunt, de acquisitis intuitu ecclesiae non*.” The text is available at <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/gregdecretals3.html>. Accessed June 6, 2016.

67 I have discussed the possession of ecclesiastical goods in *Raiding Saint Peter*, 119–127, 162.

68 *Decretum*, Lib III c. 25 q.2.

69 Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *I testamenti dei cardinali del Duecento* (Roma: Presso la Società, 1980), xxxvii.

aurea) that mentions the possibility of cardinals drafting wills, provided that the pope permits it.⁷⁰ In general, Paravicini Bagliani assumes that the *licentia* was a remedy to solve a real difficulty. It safeguarded episcopal property from lay seizure of the bishop's mense.⁷¹ Following Urban IV's definition in 1262, the *licentia* became a means to fill the pope's coffers with a "right of spoil" that enabled the papal treasury to seize the goods of ecclesiastics who died in court intestate.⁷²

In order to prevent the seizure of the church's goods, several popes, including Boniface VIII in 1298 and Clement V in 1311, protected ecclesiastical inheritance according to rights. By allowing clergy to make a will, popes regulated the succession of ecclesiastical goods according to their provenance. The clergy could bequeath goods that issued from personal revenues, being careful to clearly separate what belonged to them personally from what came with their religious benefices. This regulation, of course, worked strictly for secular clergy. Monks and nuns possessed nothing; their order did.

The license permitting clergy to make a will was first granted by the pope after he received an individual petition, but the practice developed throughout the fourteenth century. Daniel Williman records some 320 licenses in the period 1209 to 1314, but Pope John XXII (1316–1334) alone granted some 400 of them during his reign. By 1367 the licenses had become common enough to be delivered by the papal chancery without the pope's personal intervention.⁷³ A clergyman was advised to bequeath his own goods "for alms and his funeral expenses, and to remunerate 'moderately' those who had served him, after he had divided his own wealth from that of the church."⁷⁴ The testator was also advised to support the churches that were dear to him.

Even if formulaic and contrived, ecclesiastical testaments are a window into the mind of the medieval clergy.⁷⁵ According to Paravicini Bagliani, who edited some 67 wills from the thirteenth century, when cardinals drafted their wills at the end of their lives they expressed implicitly something of their judgment about themselves. As we have seen in the case of popes, so also with cardinals: as they approached their end, cardinals prepared themselves for a good death by confession, prayer, and the drafting of their last wishes. This legalistic frame of mind epitomizes

70 Paravicini Bagliani, *I testamenti*, xlv where he quotes William's statement that cardinals cannot draft a testament without papal authorization, "*Cardinales sine [pape] licentia non possunt testamentum condere vel etiam mutationem facere secundum consuetudinem Romane Ecclesie.*"

71 Paravicini Bagliani, *I testamenti*, xlv–lvi.

72 As quoted by Paravicini Bagliani, *I testamenti*, xlv, "*Bona clericorum ab intestato apud Sedem Apostolicam decedentium ad Romanam Ecclesiam de approbata consuetudine devolvuntur.*"

73 Daniel Williman, *The Right of Spoil of the Popes of Avignon, 1316–1415* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1988), 3–12.

74 Williman, *The Right of Spoil*, 11.

75 Granted that the *licentia* restricted somewhat the freedom of the testator by advocating moderation in funerary expenses and distribution of funds, and mandated, for example, rewarding members of one's household and the institutions one had served during one's career. See Paravicini Bagliani, *I testamenti*, lii–lvi for a discussion and examples of *licentiae*.

their view of death as the summary judgment on their spiritual and moral accomplishments. Imbedded in this concept, death was understood as naturally slow and prolonged to enable the timely completion of these tasks. Angelo Clareno, who described the death of Cardinal Giacomo Colonna in mid-August 1318 stated that he died with great confidence (*cum multa fiducia*).⁷⁶ He had confessed, prayed for eight straight days, and received his *licentia testandi* two days before his passing. An administrator till the end, the cardinal was confident that the dossier he would present to his ultimate judge was satisfactory enough to open the gate of Paradise. Conversely, a violent, or sudden death was understood as a sign of punishment, when unpreparedness forewarned of ill things to come.

In contrast to the wills of the laity, the identification of heirs was not the central concern of cardinals' last wishes. As clearly enunciated, ecclesiastical or charitable institutions were easily (and commonly) designated as heirs because it was almost mandated by the *licentia testandi*. Thus freed from more earthly considerations, the testament became in the cardinals' judicial-moral frame of mind an instrument to assist them toward salvation.⁷⁷ For example, it became an occasion to settle outstanding claims against them that clamored for justice. The will might settle debts or unpaid wages or any unfinished business that compromised their integrity. Likewise, their detailed attention to their funeral and burial shows an attention to the self and things theirs that was not equally found in laymen testaments.

After their profession of faith, most cardinals' testaments detailed burial instructions. In almost equal proportion, they took into consideration their place of death, opting for either a full body or a burial of body parts. In the case of full body burial, a few chose a cathedral church related to their own career (their episcopal see, for example) but most opted for the cathedral closest to their place of death. They often insisted on well-traveled and frequented urban sites that increased the possibility of post-mortem intercessions from well-intended visitors. Only two cardinals opted for rural churches and (tellingly) only one chose burial in his titled church. Similarly, cardinal-bishops also did not choose their episcopal cathedral for burial.⁷⁸

This detachment from the scenes of their careers may indicate a certain professionalization of their offices: they saw themselves as officers of the Catholic Church and not merely local bishops. A slight want of sentimentality is perhaps also reflected in their detailed prescriptions for the transport of their remains to the place of burial. Most wanted to be buried in a place they felt was "home" and if death occurred while they were away they required their bodies to be transported back to their final resting place. Depending on the distance to be covered, transportation often entailed evisceration and burial of the intestines in one place and the rest of the body in another. This was allowed until Pope Boniface VIII decreed *Detestande feritatis* (detestable savagery) in 1298 forbidding the dispersion of body parts at burial. After that date the only option left was provisional burial until an

76 Paravicini Bagliani, *I testamenti*, lxxi.

77 Paravicini Bagliani, *I testamenti*, xcix.

78 Paravicini Bagliani, *I testamenti*, ciii–cvii.

eventual transfer to the final resting place.⁷⁹ But, as we saw previously, embalming continued, nullifying somewhat the papal directives in this regard.

The *licentia* recommended that cardinals moderate their funeral expenses but this injunction did not prevent cardinals ordering various bequests and charitable distributions the day of their death, at their burials, and for various pious causes.⁸⁰ According to Paravicini Bagliani's analysis, testaments were expiatory, a means to make up for past mistakes and alleviate guilty consciences. Debts were repaid and staff and household members (the cardinals' *familiae*) rewarded, usually according to a set fee that considered status, ranks, and length of service. Cardinals understood that their death meant the end of employment for many and they tried to lighten the burden for people with whom they may have had a close rapport.⁸¹

Gifts in cash were also offered to various persons and institutions (the so-called "pious causes") usually to fund masses and intercession for the repose of their souls. As Paravicini Bagliani points out, these bequests chart the ecclesiastical networks of cardinals, and often identified important markers of their careers. For example Henry of Segusio (alias Hostiensis, the famous canonist) left bequests to the University of Bologna, the hospital of Holy Cross in Winchester, and to several establishments in the south of France; each had marked a stage of his career.⁸² In many cases, cardinals followed the complex mathematical reckoning underscored by Jacques Chiffolleau in his *La comptabilité de l'au-delà* that accounted for the exponential increase of spiritual mediation: the more money, the more masses, the more suffrages.⁸³ Further, the distribution of movable and immovable assets tied donors to beneficiaries in an intercessory commerce, the living survivors offering prayer on behalf of the dead.

No doubt because of the rarity and intrinsic worth of books, the dispersal of their personal libraries weighed on the cardinals' minds as they drafted their last wishes. In their wills, books were often itemized and distributed with care, indicating how familiar cardinals were with their libraries. In the main, these were utilitarian books, useful for their work: books of both canon and civil law, collections of decretals, bibles, and liturgical works. Cardinals usually listed where their books came from and to whom they gave or returned them, identifying as such the robust learning found at the papal court of the *Duecento* and early *Trecento*. The will was also an occasion to set at rest the guilty consciences of a few who numbered in their libraries condemned or immoral volumes, and at their deaths they ordered the books' destruction. Thus Francesco Orsini in his 1304 will ordered that all his books on alchemy and astrology be burned and destroyed.⁸⁴ Flames would dissipate the obvious guilt he felt at possessing books on alchemy and astrology.

79 Paravicini Bagliani, *I testamenti*, cviii–cxi.

80 Paravicini Bagliani, *I testamenti*, cxii–cxiv.

81 Paravicini Bagliani, *I testamenti*, cxiv–cxxiii.

82 Paravicini Bagliani, *I testamenti*, cxxvi.

83 Jacques Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité de l'au-delà: Les hommes, la mort et la religion dans la région d'Avignon à la fin du Moyen Âge, vers 1320-vers 1480* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1980).

84 Paravicini Bagliani, *I testamenti*, 345, "Item voluit et mandavit quod omnes libris suis quos habet de alchimia et astrologia et similes his comburi et destrui debeant."

When Cardinal Arnaud d'Aux dictated his will at his house in August 1320, surrounded by witnesses from his native land, he recommended his body and soul to the benevolence of Jesus, Mary, and the entire college of saints, after a traditional prologue on life's brevity and the necessity of setting one's affairs in order. Next came the renunciation of previous wills and codicils, followed by the exhortation to his executors to leave no debts unpaid, using as collateral his table service, jewelry, silver and gold reliquaries, silver and gold currency, his books and vestments, and the rest of his movable and immovable property. He then requested to be buried at the collegial church of Saint-Pierre de la Romieu in the diocese of Condom, a church that he patronized, according to the disposition taken by Fortius, bishop of Poitiers. And if he happened to die in Avignon he requested to have his funeral at the Dominican convent keeping his burial in the church of Saint-Pierre de la Romieu.⁸⁵ His testament continues with the designation of his nephews as heirs, with detailed instructions on how to preserve his right of patronage over the church. He distributed the enormous sum of 1,000 florins for alms to his poor servants and to the poor in general, and for the dowry of poor girls. We can recognize in these bequests a mix of sacred and secular obligations, where paying ordinary debts also secured prayer for one's soul and financial support for a foundation feeding the poor.

The long testament of Nicolas de Fréauville, drafted in October 1321 highlights another quality, the emotional attachment the clergy demonstrated for their religious orders. Fréauville first itemized a donation to his Dominican order of cash, books, clothes, and liturgical objects, before listing numerous bequests to a large family of many nephews and nieces, whom he also rewarded with similar items.⁸⁶

From this review of the funeral practices and last testaments marking the death of high ecclesiastical dignitaries, we see unmistakably their exemplary worth as models offered for imitation. Death so ritualized, so formalized by rite and rubric, was intended for communal reflection and instruction. Despite the spectacle of sumptuous obsequies, the great and good humbly acknowledged their finitude. But their passing from this scene was not wholly oriented to another-worldly horizon. Even in death these men betrayed how deep was their attachment to the mundane by itemizing, inventorying, and reckoning spiritual benefits along with their material goods: for them, the death knell echoed to jingling gold florins and silver livres. In the end, they counted on the suffrages of friends, relatives, and the mass of beneficiaries whom their bequests supported. Never faced alone, death found them more deeply absorbed in the affairs of Church and world than ever.

85 Baluze, *Vitae*, 3:309–310.

86 Baluze, *Vitae*, 3:323–344.

9

A DEAD ZONE IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF DEATH IN THE MIDDLE AGES: THE SENTIMENT OF SUSPICIOUS DEATH¹

Franck Collard

Medieval chroniclers referring to the deaths of individuals frequently indicate that the deceased have gone “the way of all flesh” or “paid their dues to nature.”² According to Aldobrandino of Sienna, “living and dying are at the whim of our Lord,” and death, determined by the heavens and inherent to the human condition since the Fall, appears to inspire no speculation in terms of its modalities.³ There have been numerous studies dedicated to its history, especially regarding the “sentiment of death.”⁴ Yet, perhaps because of these standard formulas, scholars have devoted no attention to a psychological phenomenon that is nonetheless quite present alongside evidence of human finitude: the questioning of death. This needs to be understood not in terms of the corporeal reality of death – though the criteria for establishing death doubtlessly merit specific research linking medicine and theology – but in terms of the doubts, assumptions, and speculations elicited by the passing of specific individuals. Here, positivist historians and physician-scientists such as

- 1 This work draws on several previous works, in particular *The Crime of Poison in the Middle Ages* (New York: Greenwood Publishings, 2008); “De l’émotion de la mort à l’émoi du meurtre. Quelques réflexions sur le sentiment de la mort suspecte à la fin du Moyen Âge,” *Revue Historique* 656 (2010): 873–907; “Faire l’histoire du corps empoisonné,” in *Le corps empoisonné. Pratiques, savoirs, imaginaire de l’Antiquité à nos jours*, Actes du colloque international de Poitiers (October 2012), ed. Lydie Bodiou, Frédéric Chauvaud and Myriam Soria (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014): 13–28.
- 2 See respectively *Cronica de Saint-Pierre d’Erfurt* (1072–1335), ed. O. Holder-Egger, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores* (henceforth MGH SS), XXX-1 (Hanover, 1896), 406–407: *mortui omnes carnis debitum persolverunt*; and *Annales Matseenses*, ed. MGH SS, IX (Hanover, 1851), 829: *Serenissimus imperator Ludwicus felix memorie apud civitatem Monacum nature debitum reddidit...*
- 3 Aldebrandin of Sienna, *Régime de santé*, ed. Landouzy and Pépin (Paris, 1911, repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1978), 6.
- 4 This is the title of a collective work, *Le sentiment de la mort au Moyen Âge*, ed. Claude Sutto (Montreal: L’Aurore, 1979).

Doctor Cabanès see only puerile flights of fancy and gullible allegations to be refuted or invalidated without attempting to understand their mechanisms.⁵ Though contemporary historiography, following the lead of Philippe Ariès and Michel Vovelle, has been receptive to the “representations” and imaginings of death as well as its corporeal elements, the investigation into suspicious deaths has thus far remained a relatively deserted field, with one exception regarding England.⁶ Barbara Rosenwein may have given the title “Confronting Death” to one of the chapters of her work *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, but there is no discussion of the problems possibly generated by confronting certain deaths.⁷ In an article that focuses on Castile at the end of the Medieval period, Emilio Mitre Fernández enumerates seven approaches to royal deaths in the documents of the time, but suspicious deaths are nowhere to be found. Nor are they mentioned in the study of Portuguese chronicles by Iona McCleery, and scarcely in the analysis of the “marvelous” death of the Black Prince.⁸

By applying various types of sources (narrative, legal, medical, and other), this chapter endeavors to demonstrate that suspicious reactions to deaths were frequent and that, far from reverting to credulity, they reflect a growing desire for knowledge, comprehension, and explication that spanned broad social categories and responded to objectives that were far from irrational. By examining the temporalities, reasons, modalities, and aims of the attitude towards *mors* in the Occident during the Middle Ages, the present study aims to enliven what constitutes a dead zone in the historiography of death.

A sentiment of the Late Middle Ages?

“There are two things with kings that we often contest: their birth and their death. We don’t want one to be legitimate and the other natural.” With this quote from

5 Augustin Cabanès, *Les morts mystérieuses de l’histoire* (Paris, 1901).

6 Marie-Christine Pouchelle, “La prise en charge de la mort: médecine, médecins et chirurgiens devant les problèmes liés à la mort à la fin du Moyen Âge,” *Archives européennes de sociologie* 17 (1976): 249–278; *A réveiller les morts: La mort au quotidien dans l’Occident médiéval*, ed. Cécile Treffort and Danièle Alexandre-Bidon (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1993); *Il cadavere*, *Micrologus* 7 (1999); Peter Dinzelbacher, “Die Präsenz des Todes in der spätmittelalterlichen Mentalität,” in *Der Tod des Mächtigen, Kult und Kultur des Todes spätmittelalterlicher Herrscher*, ed. Lothar Kolmer (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1997), 27–58. In *Death and Dying in the Middle Ages*, ed. Edelgard E. DuBruck and Barbara J. Gusik (New York: P. Lang, 1999), the introduction summarizes the bibliography of the subject without offering any reflections on the interrogation in terms of the causes of death: see also the recent work by Sara M. Butler, *Forensic Medicine and Death Investigation in Medieval England* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

7 Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

8 See respectively Emilio Mitre Fernández, “Muerte y memoria del rey en la Castilla bajomedieval,” in *La idea y el sentimiento de la muerte en la historia y en el arte de la Edad Media* (St-James of Compostella: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 1992), 17–26; Iona McCleery, “Medical Emplotment and Plotting Medicine: Health and Disease in Late Medieval Portuguese Chronicles,” *Social History of Medicine* 24.1 (2011): 125–141; and David Green, “Masculinity and Medicine: Thomas Walsingham and the Death of the Black Prince,” *Journal of Medieval History* 3 (2009): 34–51.

Alfred de Vigny, the physician Cabanès articulated what he believed was a timeless law of collective psychology, limited solely to those whose deaths were of great consequence.⁹ It is important to revisit this notion by examining whether this sentiment of suspicion varied by epoch and if it only referred to those in power. Invariably, the inquiry is heavily influenced by parameters of documentation, which differ significantly depending on whether the era is that of Grégoire de Tours or of Philippe de Commines. After 1200, the multiplication and diversification of written sources as well as the increase in institutions producing discourse boost the number of opportunities for identifying phenomena that were previously less visible, though not necessarily non-existent. It is nonetheless worthwhile to identify developments, or at the very least impressions of such developments.

At the end of the twelfth century, the author of *Miracles de Notre-Dame de Rocamadour* ridiculed the villagers of Saint-Sever for wanting to explain a spike in deaths by something other than the original sin that had rendered humans mortal.¹⁰ During what was already a rather advanced period of the Middle Ages, he illustrates the notion that it was vain to discuss death in any terms other than spiritual ones. The monopoly of clerics on the production of documentation during the High Middle Ages suggests that they rather broadly neglected to raise questions about the material and corporeal dimensions of *obitus*. They insisted that the end of earthly existence was a manifestation of the will Most High without attributing much importance to the circumstances of its occurrence or the reactions it produced. Admittedly, Grégoire de Tours was not indifferent to sickness and described, for example, the final illness of Felix de Nantes.¹¹ Yet when rulers perished, this led most commonly to vague and stereotypical remarks, possibly inspired by the hagiographic production that assigned exemplary narrative schemas to saints' deaths.¹² During the Early Middle Ages, the "Death of the Greats" did not offer much room for suspicious speculation.¹³ Hack's exhaustive survey of the deaths of Carolingian princes demonstrates how little attention hagiographic resources devoted to reasons for death.¹⁴ In his *Annales*, a genre that does not loan itself to this kind of detail, Flodoard de Reims briefly mentions the death of the Archbishop of Reims Seulf (925), which he relates with greater precision in his *Historia*.¹⁵ Richer de Saint-Remi de Reims liked to brandish his medical science¹⁶ and was

9 Cabanès, *Les morts mystérieuses*, XIV.

10 *Miracles de Notre-Dame de Rocamadour au XII^e siècle*, ed. and trans. E. Albe (Paris, 1907, repr. Toulouse: Le Pérégrinateur, 1996), 276.

11 Grégoire de Tours, *Historia Francorum*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, *MGH, Scriptores rerum merovingicarum*, I, Hanover, 1951, book VI, ch. 15.

12 See the study by Pietro Boglioni, "La scène de la mort dans les premières hagiographies latines," in *Le sentiment de la mort*, 183–210.

13 See the special number of the journal *Médiévales*, fall 1996.

14 Achim Th. Hack, *Alter, Krankheit, Tod und Herrschaft im frühen Mittelalter: das Beispiel der Karolinger* (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 2009), 68–89.

15 Flodoard, *Histoire de l'Eglise de Reims*, ed. and trans. M. Lejeune (Reims, 1854), vol. 2, 518, et *Annales de l'an 919 à l'an 976*, ed. abbé Bandeville (Reims, 1855), 32.

16 Hack, *Alter, Krankheit, Tod*, 86.

thus not opposed to taking an interest in the causes of princes' deaths. Nonetheless, he scarcely addressed the interrogations they led to, focusing rather on peremptory diagnostics such as with the case of Hugues Capet.¹⁷ The *opinio incerta* that appeared after the passing of Richard III of Normandy in 1028 does indeed attest to the existence of a collective discourse about the prince's death, but in a manner that remains very allusive.¹⁸ Orderic Vital conveyed the rumors spread throughout Normandy about the disappearance of certain figures such as the count and countess of Le Mans, but he related a high number of deaths without providing any commentary whatsoever.¹⁹ The same applies for the abbot Suger.

The cultural revolution of the twelfth century is characterized by the florescence of a natural philosophy dedicated to earthly creatures and by the appearance of a medical science that aimed to understand and heal diseases in accordance with rational principles. The progressive development of professions in health responded to an early social demand in Mediterranean Europe. These factors fostered a desire to better understand and indicate specific causes of death. The *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise* abound in details on the subject.²⁰ In addition, the growing powers of the princes meant that their passing elicited greater drama, now with stronger implications and a more significant impact in a world with improved circulation of information. In 1152, Conrad III fell ill and then died *non sine suspicione*, as did William of York in 1154.²¹ According to Matthew Paris, Louis VIII's passing in 1226 caused a stir.²² Though the monk Saint-Albans fails to mention the comments prompted by the numerous death notices given in his account, he presents the deaths of four monks from Durham, who had come to the Pope in order to defend their abbot's interests from the King Henry III, as strange; likewise, he willingly adds to theories regarding other problematical deaths.²³ Though Guillaume de Puylaurens collected references to sudden deaths, as in the case of the count of Toulouse Raymond VI and the count of Foix, he did so without evoking any affiliated suspicions. In his discussion of Louis VIII, he only mentions that a

17 Richer de Saint-Remi, *Historia Francorum*, ed. and trans. R. Latouche (Paris, 1930), II, 331. See Bernhard Blumenkrantz, "Où est mort Hugues Capet?" *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes* 115 (1957): 168–171 and Laurent Theis, "La mort très obscure d'un roi de peu, Hugues Capet, 996," in *Les derniers jours des rois*, ed. Patrice Gueniffey (Paris: Perrin-Pocket, 2014), 50–64.

18 Guillaume de Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, ed. W. Stubb (London, 1887), vol. 1, 211.

19 Orderic Vital, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. A. Le Prévost et L. Delisle (Paris, 1840), vol. 2, 101.

20 *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise*, ed. L. Halphen et R. Poupardin (Paris, 1913).

21 See Otton de Freising, *Gesta Friderici imperatoris*, MGH SS (see above) (Hanover, 1868), 389; and David Knowles, "The Case of Saint William of York," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 5 (1936): 162–177.

22 Matthieu Paris, *Chronica majora*, ed. H. R. Luard (London, 1876), vol. 3, 107 and 116, from Roger of Wendover (*Flores historiarum*, ed. H. Hewlett [London, 1887], vol. 2, 313).

23 Paris, *Chronica majora*, IV, 61.

mysterious disease had taken his life.²⁴ For the multiple death notices contained in his chronicle, Bernard Itier, monk of Saint-Martial de Limoges († 1224), only indicates suspicion for three cases.²⁵

There was a change in the period from 1300 to 1330, as noted by Michelet, who saw the beginning of the fourteenth century as nothing but a long trial and an “epidemic of crime.”²⁶ Many princely deaths fomented doubt. Gilles li Musit’s *Fuit mala suspicio* discussed the death of Louis X (1316).²⁷ Jean de Saint-Victor indicated the upheaval caused by the deaths of Philippe IV and his successor, as well as the *suspicio exorta* following the death of the queen Jeanne de Navarre and the suspicions associated with the passing of Philippe V.²⁸ When Louis de Nevers, son of the Count of Flanders, died in 1322, speculations led some to believe that the prince had been poisoned.²⁹ Similar questioning arose with the death of Pope Benedict XI in 1304.³⁰ The days when Pierre Damien affirmed that pontiffs only expired by divine will were well over. In his opusculum about papal longevity, written around 1065 – a time when the bishops of Rome were actually dying at a quick pace – he wrote without hesitation that a pope’s life ended only by natural means. The prevailing sentiment for Christians was not to be suspicion but fear, since a pope’s death was a direct manifestation of divine will.³¹ Around 1300, the death of another pillar of Christianity, the emperor, was not experienced with the same certitude. Albertino Mussato’s text speculates about the reasons for Henry VII’s demise in 1313.³² Ptolemy of Lucca emphasized the *varia relatio*: “he died on August 24 of natural causes, though some, out of malice, have said that he was given poison with his Eucharist.”³³

Around the middle of the century, there continued to be numerous cases, both in Aragon (the suspicious death in November 1347 of the infante Jaume, third son of Alfonso III, in Barcelona) and the Germanic empire, as with Ludwig of Bavaria.³⁴ Froissart believes that the death in 1324 of Marie de Luxembourg, wife

24 Guillaume de Puylaurens, *Chronique*, ed. and trans. J. Duvernoy (Paris: CNRS, 1976), 122–123.

25 Bernard Itier, *Chronique*, ed. and trans. J.-L. Lemaître (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1998).

26 Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France*, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), vol. 5, 135.

27 Gilles li Muisit, *Chronique et annales*, ed. H. Lemaître (Paris, 1906), 91.

28 See respectively, *Chronique anonyme de Caen, Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France* (henceforth RHGF), vol. 22 (Paris, 1865), 26; and Jean de Saint-Victor, *Memoriale historiarum*, RHGF, vol. 21 (Paris, 1855), 652 and 674.

29 Saint-Victor, *Memoriale historiarum*, 677.

30 *Processus Bernardi Delitiosi*, ed. A. Friedlander (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1996): 39.

31 Pierre Damien, *Opusculum de brevitae vitae pontificum romanorum et divina providentia*, ed. Migne, *Patrologie latine* (PL), 145 (Paris, 1853), 471–480, here 474. However, it is important to note that the death of Victor III (1086) generated rumors. See for example Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, book III, ch. 266, II, 326.

32 Albertino Mussato, *De gestis Henrici VII. Caesaris*, ou *Historia augusta*, ed. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* (henceforth RIS), X (Milan, 1727), 568: he lists three pathological causes.

33 Ptolemy of Lucca, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. Muratori, RIS, XI (Milan, 1728), 1239–1240.

34 Jean de Hocsem, *Chronique*, ed. G. Kurth (Brussels, 1927), 368; Michael McVaugh, *Medicine before the Plague: Practitioners and their Patients in the Crown of Aragon, 1285–1345* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 156.

of Charles IV of France, occurred “suspiciously.”³⁵ He reported the suspicion that arose among the Ghents in 1379 upon the death of the oppositional leader Jehan Lyon.³⁶ The Monk of Saint-Denis was not the last to communicate people’s reactions to news of deaths, such as that of the cardinal of Laon in 1388.³⁷ The ailments and deaths of the powerful became systematically subject to “wild imaginings,” as Honorat Bovet lamented circa 1390.³⁸ The demise of Michelle de France, Duchess of Burgundy, in 1422 illustrates this phenomenon: “yet there were various murmurings throughout Gand about what had caused her death... for some said that the princess fell into a languor from the melancholy of what had happened (the murder of her father-in-law, John the Fearless, attributed to her brother the dauphin), fearing that her husband would now only look at her with regret, and this meant that her death could be natural; this appeared to be true. Others considered the matter with greater suspicion and maintained that she had been poisoned.”³⁹ When the duke of Brabant met his end in 1430, the sentiment was very much the same,⁴⁰ as with the case of the duke of Gloucester in 1447.⁴¹ Charles VII’s death “did not pass without the suspicion of poisoning,” and this was entertained “with no little belief,” says Thomas Basin, because of the attitude of the heir to the throne upon learning of his father’s death.⁴² It is easy to add further examples, especially from Italy. Sources mention the rumors that accompanied the afflictions and deaths of powerful figures such as Bianca Maria Visconti (1468).⁴³ Gian Galeazzo Sforza expired in 1494, “not without some suspicion,” according to the Milanese chronicler Bernardino Corio.⁴⁴

Raising questions about the deaths of individuals, including women – even if narrators rarely mention the causes of death for queens of England – is not only a

35 Jean Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. S. Luce, G. Raynaud and L. Mirot (Paris: Société de l’Histoire de France, 1869) I, 83.

36 *Ibid.*, ed. J. A. Buchon (Paris, 1837), II, 56.

37 *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denis*, ed. L.-F. Bellaguet (Paris, 1839), vol. 1, 563. Jean Juvénal des Ursins, *Histoire de Charles VI*, ed. J. A. Buchon (Paris, 1843), 364. Strangely, this problem of suspicious death is not among the elements addressed by Bernard Guenée, *L’opinion publique à la fin du Moyen Âge d’après la Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denis* (Paris: Perrin, 2002).

38 Honorat Bovet, *L’apparition de Jehan de Meun*, ed. J. Pichon (Paris, 1845), 11.

39 Georges Chastellain, *Chronique*, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove (Brussels, 1863), vol. 1, 341; the same tone is evident in Enguerrand de Monstrelet, *Chronique*, ed. L. Douet d’Arcq (Paris, 1860), vol. 4, 118.

40 Chastellain, *Chronique*, book II, ch. 25–26, II, 72 et seq.; Monstrelet, *Chronique*, IV, 399–400; Edmond de Dyncer, *Chronica ducum Lotharingiae et Brabantiae*, ed. P. F. X. de Ram (Brussels, 1860), book VI, ch. 236–237, vol. 3, 497 et seq.

41 Mathieu d’Escouchy, *Chronique*, ed. G. Du Fresne de Beaucourt (Paris, 1863), vol. 1, 114.

42 Thomas Basin, *Historia Karoli septimi*, ed. and trans. Ch. Samaran (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1944), book V, ch. 21, vol. 2, 276.

43 See Marilyn Nicoud, “Expérience de la maladie et échange épistolaire. Les derniers moments de Bianca Maria Visconti (mai–octobre 1468),” *Mélanges de l’Ecole Française de Rome, Moyen Âge* 112–1 (2000): 311–458.

44 Bernardino Corio, *Storia di Milano*, ed. E. de Magri (Milan, 1857), vol. 3, 574.

psychosocial phenomenon.⁴⁵ It is also a legal phenomenon that first burgeoned in northern Italy and in Provence (end of the thirteenth century), then in France over the course of the fourteenth century, fostering the development of the inquisitorial procedure that meant a simple suspicion could set the legal machine in motion so as to ensure that a possible crime did not go unpunished: it was in 1286 when Salimbene, in Cremona, reported that a male cadaver had been opened in order to determine the cause of death.⁴⁶ Such investigations were not reserved for the dominant milieus. In 1312, the bailiff of Orléans had Jeanne, the dame de la Chome and widow of Guillaume d'Aguilli imprisoned, "suspected for the death of her husband, without any accuser or denouncer coming forward."⁴⁷ In Reims, a man was suspected in 1348 of having poisoned his wife in order to marry another.⁴⁸ Significantly, death was interrogated by experts acting as "mires jurés" (physicians having taken a professional or legal oath), as in the criminal register of Saint-Martin-des-Champs from the fourteenth century: a fur trader, Lorin de Nanthuelg, was a suspect in the death of Jehannin de Troies, whose body was

45 Michael Evans, *The Death of Kings: Royal Deaths in Medieval England* (London, New York: Hambledon and London, 2003), 213.

46 Enzo Cotturi, "L'insegnamento dell'anatomia nelle università medioevali," in *Universita e societa nei secoli XII-XVI* (Pistoia, 1982), 131–145, here 135. For the case of the Parlement de Paris, see Louis de Carbonnières, *La procédure devant la chambre criminelle du parlement de Paris au XIV^e siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2004), 514–537. For the medical point of view, see Danielle Jacquart, *Le milieu médical en France du XII^e au XV^e siècles* (Genève: Droz, 1981), 291–293. Regarding the question of the recourse of the law to physicians, see in particular Joseph Shatzmiller, *Médecine et justice en Provence médiévale* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1989); likewise, "The Jurisprudence of the Dead Body. Medical Practitioners at the Service of Civic and Legal Authorities," in *Il cadavere, Micrologus* 7 (1999): 223–230; Katherine Park, "The Criminal and the Sainly Body: Autopsy and Dissection in Medieval Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994): 1–33; Andrée Courtemanche, "The Judge, the Doctor and the Poisoner: Medical Expertise in Manosquin Judicial Rituals at the End of the 14th Century," in *Medieval and Early Modern Ritual: Formalized Behavior in Europe, China and Japan*, ed. J. Rollo-Koster (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 105–123; Franck Collard, "Ouvrir pour découvrir. Réflexions sur les expertises de cadavres empoisonnés à l'époque médiévale," in *Le corps à l'épreuve*, ed. Danièle Quéruel, Evelyne Samama, and Franck Collard (Langres: Guéniot, 2002), 177–190; *Id.*, "Secundum artem et peritiam medicina. Les expertises dans les affaires d'empoisonnement à la fin du Moyen Âge," in *Expertise et conseil au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2012), 161–173; and Joël Chandelier and Marilyn Nicoud, "Entre droit et médecine: Les origines de la médecine légale en Italie," in *Les frontières des savoirs en Italie à l'époque des premières universités (XIII^e-XV^e siècles)*, ed. J. Chandelier and A. Robert (Rome: EFR, 2015), 233–293.

47 *Les Olim*, ed. A. Beugnot (Paris, 1848), vol. 3–2, 748.

48 *Archives administratives de la ville de Reims*, ed. P. Varin (Paris, 3 vol., 1843), vol. 2–2, 1186, plea from January 31, 1349 (stylus novus): "regarding the suspicion of having previously poisoned his wife because he wanted to marry the widow of Drouynet Buiron afterwards; his wife died from the poisoning, as became known to the lieutenant" ("sur le soupçon d'avoir empoisonné jadis sa femme parce qu'il voulait, après la mort de celle-ci, se marier avec la femme de feu Drouynet Buiron; de cet empoisonnement, sa femme était décédée ainsi que cela était venu à la connaissance dudit lieutenant").

found in the *hôtel* where they had lived together; the next day, August 25, 1332, a surgeon examined the corpse and found nothing broken or wounded, nor any evidence of a blow that could have led to death or injury. He had died from the brain disorder known as apoplexy, which had led to an effusion of the brain through the nostrils, ears, and mouth.⁴⁹ The registers of the Parlement de Paris also contain *pro suspicione mortis* investigations.⁵⁰ There are archives in Bologna that document growing numbers of reports for autopsies conducted by legally mandated physicians, either at the request of one party or on a voluntary basis, in order to examine the causes of death.⁵¹ As early as 1302, the authorities ordered the autopsy of one Azzelino, whose death had seemed suspect.⁵² Including all types of crime, the legal archives of Bologna have 19 expert reports for the year 1310 and almost seven times as many for 1359.⁵³ In Milan, the evaluations abound in the vocabulary of suspicion.⁵⁴ Smaller towns such as Reggio Emilia took the same steps.⁵⁵ In England, despite differences in the legal procedure, an identical system for examining suspicious deaths developed after 1200. Investigations were superficial and the reasons were primarily fiscal.⁵⁶

By order of both religious and secular authorities, the epidemic of 1348 led to professional interrogations that resulted in the *Pestschriften* edited by K. Sudhoff.⁵⁷ This intellectual position differs radically from the reception of the Plague of Justinian, undoubtedly because the providential dimension accorded to the latter sufficed to

49 *Registre criminel de Saint-Martin des Champs au XIV^e siècle*, ed. L. Tanon (Paris, 1877), 20–21; other exams to see if the death was “natural”: 29, 46, 109.

50 Example, French National Archives, *Parlement criminel*, X²a 10, f. 90, Jehan Rose imprisoned at Châtelet de Paris under suspicion for the death of the deceased Jehan de Verruyes (1378); X²a 14, 93v, suspicious death of Jehan Guevaut, draper. Preparatory interrogations were made against his widow Jehanne and her new husband, Robin Calet (December 13 and 14, 1402).

51 Eugenio Dall’Osso, *L’organizzazione medico-legale a Bologna e a Venezia nei secoli XII-XIV* (Cesena, 1956); Ludwig Münster, “La medicina legale in Bologna da suoi albori fino alla fine del secolo XIV,” *Bollettino dell’Accademia medica pistoiese Filippo Pancini* 26 (1955): 257–271, here 259.

52 Gunther Wolff, “Leichen-besichtigung und – untersuchung bis zur Karolina als Vorstufe Gerichtlicher Sektion,” *Janus* 42 (1938): 225–286, here 254.

53 Edgardo Ortalli, “La perizia medica a Bologna nei secoli XIII e XIV. Normativa e pratica di un Istituto giudiziario,” *Deputazione di Storia patria per le provincie di Romagna, Atti ed memorie*, nova serie 17–19 (1965–1968): 223–259.

54 Marilyn Nicoud, *Le prince et les médecins. Pensée, cultures et pratiques médicales à la cour des Visconti et des Sforza (1402–1476)* (Rome: EFR, 2014), ch. 4; here, the suspected cause of death is the plague.

55 Joanna Carraway Vitiello, “Forensic Evidence, Lay Witnesses and Medical Expertise in the Criminal Courts of Late Medieval Italy,” in *Medicine and the Law in the Middle Ages*, ed. Wendy J. Turner and Sara M. Butler (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 133–156.

56 Butler, *Forensic Medicine and Death Investigation*.

57 *Pestschriften aus den ersten 150 Jahren nach der Epidemie des schwarzen Todes*, *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 2 (1909) to 17 (1925). The bibliography for the plague and perceptions of it is vast. One of the most comprehensive studies is that conducted by Jean-Noël Biraben, *Les hommes et la peste en France et dans les pays européens et méditerranéens* (Paris, La Haye: Mouton, 1975–6).

squelch suspicious sentiments.⁵⁸ It's clear that in the mid-fourteenth century, the ultimate origin of epidemics remained associated with the heavens, but this transcendent causality did not eliminate the desire for understanding, intensified by the surge in medical knowledge as well as a growing fear of hidden evil and occult forces.⁵⁹

The development observed vis-à-vis the plague did not occur simply because documentation became more visible. It proceeded from a general change in approaches to death that is apparent when comparing individual cases from one era to the next. During the Carolingian period and into the eleventh century, the deaths of powerful figures who had consumed inappropriate or incorrect dosages of potions were not subject to suspicion, except in the controversial instance of Charles the Bald.⁶⁰ Sturmii, abbot of Fulda, died in 779 after ingesting a medicine prescribed by a physician whom Charlemagne had recommended. No suspicions arose,⁶¹ nor when the king of France Henri I died after taking the improper dosage of a remedy.⁶² Yet in 1391, the death of Amédée VII de Savoie under similar circumstances inspired a strong sense of suspicion.⁶³ Research into the human causality of death, based on a naturalist approach developed after 1100, thus increasingly challenged biblical evidence of individual finitude and the invocation of providential action, which of course maintained its role; Richard Lescot provided no alternative explanation for the sudden demise of an arrogant man in the middle of the fourteenth century.⁶⁴ In his diary, Jaccopo Volterra relates the death of the abbot Ferry de Cluny on October 7, 1483: he cheerfully went home following a ceremony, ate, suffered from cardiac pains, and then died within the hour. There isn't the slightest indication of suspicion.⁶⁵ Such cases, however, now seemed to be rare. People wanted to get answers, minimize the unknown, and reveal what was hidden: "many die without scholars knowing what the cause was," remarked Pietro Carrario in 1476 in a *quaestio* that completed Pietro d'Abano's treaty on poison.⁶⁶ There is thus evidence of suspicion; the question remains as to what forms of expression it took.

58 Voir Jean-Noël Biraben, Jacques Le Goff, "La peste dans le haut Moyen Âge," *Annales ESC* 24 (1969): 1484–1510.

59 This is the origin of the obsession with *occultum* as successfully identified by Jacques Chiffolleau. See Dominique Barthélémy and Jacques Chiffolleau, "Les sources cléricales et la notion de clandestinité au Moyen Âge (France, XI^e–XIV^e)," in *Histoire et clandestinité du Moyen Âge à la première guerre mondiale*, special edition of the *Revue du Vivarais* (1979): 19–39.

60 Janet Nelson, "La mort de Charles le Chauve," *Médiévales* 31 (fall 1996): 53–66.

61 *Vita Sturmii*, RHGF, vol. 5 (Paris, 1744), 448.

62 Vital, *Historia ecclesiastica*, II, 74.

63 A significant part of the legal documentation for this very rich affair was assembled as supporting documents by Giovanni Carbonelli, *Gli ultimi giorni del conte rosso e i processi per la sua morte* (Pinerolo, 1912). See Franck Collard, "Perfidus physicus ou inexpertus medicus. Le cas Jean de Grandville, médecin du comte Amédée VII de Savoie," in *Mires, barbiers, physiciens et charlatans: les marges de la médecine de l'Antiquité au XVI^e siècle*, ed. Franck Collard and Evelyne Samama (Langres: Guéniot, 2004), 133–149.

64 Richard Lescot, *Chronique*, ed. J. Lemoine (Paris, 1896), 10.

65 Jacoppo Volterra, *Diarium romanum*, RIS (Citta di Castello, 1904), 123.

66 Petrus Carrarius, *Questio de venenis ad terminum*, Venice, 1566, 269.

Expressions of suspicion

The formulas encountered in the sources time and again, *ut dicitur* and *ut ferebatur* (“as is said” and “as is reported”) indicate the sentiment of suspicion. The discourse, however, can take several forms, from collective rumors that approximate the whisperings of gossip to individual, well-justified statements sometimes written down in libelles and letters.⁶⁷ Dynter and Chastellain present two degrees of the phenomenon in regards to the death of the duke of Brabant. The first designates rumor as indistinct and general talk (*rumor inter populares*).⁶⁸ Without assigning it a specific origin, the second presents it as a constructed, accusative discourse.⁶⁹ Speech served to fill in the void left both by the mystery of death and the vacuum of authority.

To signify Parisians’ reaction to the death of the royal heir in 1276, Guillaume de Nangis used the term *murmurabant*.⁷⁰ *Hystriones* (in the sense of street singers) spread the news of the suspicious death of the duke of Bavaria and his wife.⁷¹ Following the death of Amédée VII de Savoie, the entire county resounded with the *rumor populi*, as indicated in a document from August 1392.⁷² A *rumor scandalosus* spread like wildfire about the suspicious death of a Cistercian monk in 1461 at the Montpeyroux monastery, with an adjective indicating the detriment that it caused to the monastic community.⁷³ In regards to the death of Michelle de France, Chastellain opined that “there has never been so much whispering about town than this.”⁷⁴ The unbridled rumors of collective talk took the place of the ritualized, seemly words of mourning, and could turn into “belief.” Gian Galeazzo Sforza’s death, which took place shortly after Charles VIII’s visit, led “all of Italy” to the conviction that there was nothing natural about it.⁷⁵

The sentiment of suspicious death often integrated a causality that was criminal and, where necessary, also accusatory. Commynes referred to the comments elicited by the death of Charles de Guyenne in 1472 as “strange words.”⁷⁶ The Latin effectively conveys this reality that constructs *suspicio* with a genitive that refers back to its object: *suspicio veneni*. The *veneficium* is frequently invoked, with its double

67 For a topic that has received a great deal of attention recently, see in particular *La rumeur au Moyen Âge, du mépris à la manipulation (V^e-XV^e siècle)*, ed. Maïté Billoré and Myriam Soria (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011), with the very illuminating introduction by Claude Gauvard.

68 Dynter, *Chronica*, VI, 236.

69 Chastellain, *Chronique*, II, 26.

70 Guillaume de Nangis, *Vita Philippi tertii*, *RHGF*, vol. 20 (Paris, 1840), 503.

71 Mathias von Neuenburg, *Cronica*, ed. A. Hofmeister (Berlin, 1924), *MGH, Scriptores rerum germanicarum in usum Scholarum* (henceforth *MGH SS rr g. in us. sch.*), n. s. (4), 160.

72 Carbonelli, *Gli ultimi giorni*, 254.

73 *Statuta capitulorum generalium ordinis cisterciensis*, ed. J. Canivez (Louvain, 8 vol., 1937), vol. 5, 96.

74 Chastellain, *Chronique*, I, 341.

75 Guichardin, *Storia d'Italia*, ed. S. Seidel Menchi (Turin, 1971), vol. 1, 13.

76 Philippe de Commynes, *Mémoires*, ed. J. Blanchard (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2001), book III, ch. 9, 215–216.

meaning of poisoning and bewitchment. Suspicion and *veneficia* are linked because, as with bewitchment, the concealed workings of the *venenum* are invisible to the eye and complicate the matter of understanding the reasons for death, unless it borrows from signs for maladies such as dysentery or malaria.⁷⁷ “Speculations of evil” (as Froissart said of Charles VI’s sickness) did not just call the death of the deceased into question, but also implicated the alleged perpetrators.⁷⁸ During the same period (in 1276 and 1278), the vicious gossip circulating in the streets of Paris and of Prague targeted the queen of France and of Bohemia following the death of and serious risk of death to two young princes.⁷⁹ According to Pierre de Fénin, the residents of Ghent designated those responsible for the duchess Michelle’s death in 1422: “and weighed heavy accusations on some rulers who were in the service of the duke Philip...”⁸⁰

Reputation (or *fama*, rumor) “is not born of true science,” as said by one of the parties involved in a case opened in the French Parlement at the beginning of the fifteenth century after the suspicious death of an elderly woman who had, according to some, died of natural causes, while others contended that she had been poisoned.⁸¹ However, it’s necessary to refrain from opposing an ignorant mass culture that generates suspicion with an elite, educated culture that was the domain of those in the legal and medical professions. The sentiment of suspicious death intermingles both the voices of the elite and of the commoners. Did Commynes not make suspicion the signature malady of princes?⁸² The sentiment of suspicious death was one that was shared.

Triggers of suspicion

A discussion of the elements that generated this sentiment will advance our understanding of this phenomenon. Several factors of the questioning of death come into play and are, in part, essentially “deviations from the norm.” Below is a brief presentation of such deviations, bearing in mind that this norm is “natural” death. During the Middle Ages, there was no definition for this concept, which finds itself at the intersection of several domains.⁸³

Bede distinguishes natural death, with no other origin than divine will, from criminal death, which presumes external intervention.⁸⁴ In the voluminous

77 For further reading, see the present author’s *The Crime of Poison*.

78 Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. Buchon, IV, 279.

79 Julien de Gaulle, “Pièces sur Pierre de la Brosse,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire de France*, 1844, 87–100, see 88 and 98, letter from Marie de Brabant to the pope summarizing the condemnations to which she had been subject. *Cronica de gestis principum a tempore Rudolphi regis usque ad tempora Ludovici imperatoris*, ed. G. Leidinger, *MGH SS rr g. in us. sch.* (Hanover-Leipzig, 1918), 36.

80 Pierre de Fénin, *Mémoires*, ed. Dupont (Paris, 1837), 182.

81 National Archives of France, X²a 14, 217.

82 Commynes, *Mémoires*, book VIII, ch. 20, 643.

83 Butler, *Forensic medicine*, 177–181 and 271.

84 Bède, *Pénitentiel*, ed. F. W. H. Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen der abendländischen Kirche* (Halle, 1851), *De occisione*.

chronicle of Spain that he wrote in the thirteenth century, the Castilian Rodrigo Jimenez de Rada distinguishes *mors propria*, or natural death, from other types.⁸⁵ The medical literature essentially endeavored to outline the processes leading to and the means for prognosticating death.⁸⁶ Jean de Saint-Amand wrote: "death is considered violent when its agent is not natural and when this violent death proceeds from three causes: the first is that which is contrary to life, the second the suppression of natural moisture, and the third is the decrease in natural heat."⁸⁷ Elements that would lead to doubts about the natural character of a death are nowhere to be found. Texts about poisons, which started to proliferate at the end of the thirteenth century, focused less on criteria for suspicious deaths than on *signa mortui ex veneno* that allowed for the accurate identification of causes for death without raising suspicions about the responsible agent. By making a comparison with death due to poison, Guy de Chauliac negatively defined death by natural causes: "The signs that somebody has died from poisoning are in Galen, in the sixth book of the *Curatio Morborum Internorum*, where he writes: 'When somebody abounding with good humors and with a good diet becomes pale or blackish, or turns different colors, or weak, as generally results from some noxious – that is, poisonous – drug, this signifies that this person has been poisoned. Otherwise, death has been the result of corruptions from the body itself.'"⁸⁸ This presents several elements that could trigger suspicion.

The first does not appear above and is quantitative: even when attributed to divine vengeance, deaths that are on a massive, epidemic, or epizootic scale lead to suspicions about a terrestrial agent. This was true at the time of Grégoire de Tours, when an outbreak of dysentery resulted in unrivaled devastation and led to the belief that it was a *pestilentia manufacta*, a sickness provoked by humans.⁸⁹ In Saint-Sever, there were deaths among inhabitants that were too close together to not appear suspect.⁹⁰ In 1258, suspicions abounded in England after several barons grew ill and died.⁹¹ In 1348, the *universalis decessus* raised a *vehemens suspicio*.⁹² For, as Guillaume de Machaut wrote, "there wasn't a single doctor or healer who could state the cause, the provenance, the nature [of the epidemic]."⁹³ For Alphonse de

85 Rodrigo Jimenez de Rada, *Historia de rebus Hispanie sive historia gothica*, ed. J. Fernandez Valverde (Turnhout: Brepols, 1987), 57 and 122.

86 Danielle Jacquart, "Le difficile pronostic de mort (XIV^e-XV^e siècles)," *Médiévales* 46 (2004): 11–22.

87 Jean de Saint-Amand, *Concordance*, ed. J. Pagel (Berlin, 1992), 197 et seq.

88 Gui de Chauliac, *La grande chirurgie*, ed. E. Nicaise (Paris, 1890), 434; ed. M. McVaugh under the title *Inventarium sive chirurgia magna* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 305–306.

89 Grégoire de Tours, *Historia Francorum*, V, 34: *a multis autem adserebatur venenum occultum esse* ("many believed that there had been a hidden poison").

90 *Miracles de Notre-Dame de Rocamadour*, 276: "family and friends were dying in an untimely manner" ("des proches ou des amis décédaient de façon inopinée").

91 Paris, *Chronica majora*, V, 702.

92 Muisit, *Chronique et annales*, 223.

93 Guillaume de Machaut, *Jugement du roi de Navarre*, in *Œuvres*, ed. P. Tarbé (Reims-Paris, 1849, repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1977), 73: "There was no doctor who knew the cause of

Cordoue, the causes were not natural.⁹⁴ Although medical science had achieved high etiological and nosological standards – at least in the opinion of its practitioners – it wasn't able to explain the plague with humoral theories. This led people to attribute it to outside sources.⁹⁵ On a lesser scale, repeated deaths likewise fostered the sentiment of suspicious death. Rumors followed the simultaneous deaths of the duchess of Austria and her son in 1305, the consecutive deaths of the duke of Bavaria and his wife in 1340, and the deaths of the duke of Austria's two sons in late 1344–early 1345.⁹⁶ Pierre de Fénin demonstrates that the quick succession of deaths of Louis de Guyenne followed by Jean de Touraine and then his father-in-law Guillaume de Hollande (December 1415, April and May 1417) fostered suspicion among “many people.”⁹⁷

The individual parameters of death that triggered suspicion are not surprising. The first element is the age of the deceased. For Isidore of Seville, “there are three types of death: immature, early, and natural. The first happens during childhood, the second in youth, and the last is natural and comes during old age.”⁹⁸ Caesarius de Heisterbach distinguishes *mors immatura* (in children), *mors acerba* (for people in their prime) and appropriate or natural death that occurs in the winter of life.⁹⁹ Nicolas de Lyre wrote that those with a good constitution could live to be 80 years old.¹⁰⁰ Based on Scripture, writings on medicine and health determined the natural age for death.¹⁰¹ For Aldobrandino of Sienna, nature had chosen 70 as the age for death.¹⁰² Dying before this age provided an instance of

the illness, its origins, or what it was” (“Ne fuscien n'estoit ni mire / Qui bien sceust la cause dire / Dont ce venoit, ne que c'estoit”).

94 Alphonse de Cordoue, *Epistola et regimen de pestilentia*, ed. K. Sudhoff, in *Pestschriften aus den ersten 150 Jahren*, III, 224. “the cause is something other than natural... Experience has shown that the origins of this epidemic are not some constellation and thus there was no natural infection of the elements, but the cause rather comes from the depths of a malice of profound iniquity invented through the artifice of the most adept; this is why recommendations from knowledgeable physicians are unable to bring any relief to those afflicted by this cruel, pernicious, and worst evil” (“la cause est autre que naturelle... L'expérience a montré que cette épidémie ne provient pas de quelque constellation et par conséquent il n'y a eu aucune infection naturelle des éléments, mais elle provient des tréfonds d'une malice de profonde iniquité inventée par un artifice des plus subtils, d'où le fait que le conseil des médecins savants ne puisse apporter nulle aide aux malades atteints de ce mal cruel et pernicieux, le pire qui soit”).

95 Michel Hébert, “La mort: impact réel et choc psychologique,” in *Le sentiment de la mort au Moyen Âge*, 17–31.

96 See respectively, Saint-Victor, *Memoriale historiarum*, 644; Neuenburg, *Cronica*, 160; and Jean De Winthertur, *Chronica*, ed. F. Baethgen (Berlin, 1923), *MGH ss rrg. in us. sch.*, n. s. (3), 251.

97 Fénin, *Mémoires*, 70: “[these matters] occurred in a short period of time” (“[ces affaires] advindrent toutes en peu d'espace”).

98 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum libri XX*, ed. F. V. Otto (Leipzig, 1833), XI, 2, 32.

99 Césaire de Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum*, ed. J. Strange (Cologne, 1851), Distinction XI.

100 Cited by Rolf Sprandel, “Alter und Todesfürcht nach der spätmittelalterlichen Bibellexegese” in *Death in the Middle Ages*, ed. Herman Braet and Werner Verbeke (Louvain: Leuven University Press), 1983, 107–116, here 115 n. 36.

101 Ps. 89:10.

102 “Mors natureuz si est en LXX ans par nature”; cited by Pouchelle, “La prise en charge de la mort,” 274. Also see “Vita longa.” *Vecchiaia e durata della vita*, Marie-Thérèse

*mors abbreviata*¹⁰³ or *mors immature*, which strikes at an inappropriate time following the survival of the perils associated with childhood.¹⁰⁴ When Henry VII met his demise at the age of 35, suspicions arose because he had been in his prime, and at what should have been the middle of his life.¹⁰⁵ The death of Lionel de Clarence appeared to have occurred “rather astonishingly” (Froissart), for he was a “young knight, strong and very adept.”¹⁰⁶ The dauphins Louis de Guyenne and Jean de Touraine both died young, at 20 and 17 years of age, respectively (1415 and 1417), which contributed considerably to suspicions about their deaths.¹⁰⁷ The early, quick death of Ladislas of Hungary, who was only 18, loomed large in the *suspicio post mortem* that arose in 1457.¹⁰⁸ The same was the case for the 25-year-old duke of Brabant, who had been young and full of life (*juvenis strenuus*), and whom his entourage had believed was destined for “longevity and a lengthy reign,” perhaps based on a horoscope.¹⁰⁹ For Yves de Chartres around 1100, the *immatura mors* far from concealing some mystery, was a punishment for wickedness: “A premature death takes those who, instead of converting repentantly, continue to live in malice.”¹¹⁰ In the final centuries of the Middle Ages, early deaths fostered doubt and questioning.

The circumstances surrounding such deaths also came into play, though the alternatives ended up generalizing suspicion. “Evil death” or sudden death, which was so dreaded because it put the soul at risk, no longer came down to an indication of divine punishment; it could be attributed to numerous causes,¹¹¹ and for this reason generated doubt. The *inopinatus transitus* of the archbishop of York in 1154 seemed suspect, explained William of Newburgh, because it had been so unexpected.¹¹² The *mors inopinata* of Guillaume de Valence in Viterbe (1239) was suspicious for this reason, according to Matthew Paris.¹¹³ When death did not announce itself with warning

Lorcin, “Vieillesse et vieillissement vus par les médecins du Moyen Âge,” *Bulletin du centre d'histoire économique et sociale de la région lyonnaise* 4 (1983): 5–22.

103 Jacquot, “Le difficile pronostic,” 10.

104 Norbert Ohler, *Sterben und Tod im Mittelalter* (Munich: Artemis, 1990), dedicates chapter VI to premature death without presenting any reflections on how it was perceived.

105 Pierre de Zittau, *Chronique de Königsalle*, ed. J. Loserth (Vienna, 1875), 351.

106 Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. by the SHF, VII, 83–84: “Of which people were quite stunned...” (“Dont ses gens furent très ébahis...”). Note that the *Chronicon Anglie, 1328–1388*, ed. Edward M. Thompson (London, 1874), 61, deems the duke’s death unexpected and sudden but without drawing any conclusions about its causes.

107 Clément de Fauquembergue, *Journal*, ed. A. Tuetey (Paris, 1910), vol. 2, 32.

108 See Gerold Hayer, “Krankheit, Sterben und Tod eines Fürsten. Eine Augenzeugenbericht über die letzten Lebenstage Herzog Albrechts VI. von Österreich,” in “*Du guoter tôt.*” *Sterben im Mittelalter. Ideal und Realität*, ed. Markus J. Wenninger (Klagenfurt: Wieser Verlag, 1998), 31–50.

109 Chastellain, *Chronique*, II, 25. The moment of *mors fatalis* is determined according to the position of stars at birth: see Giovanni Balbi, *Catholicon* (Mayence, 1460, identical reprint in 1971), *sv mors*.

110 Cited by Sprandel, “Alter und Todesfurch,” 109 n. 9.

111 Vincent de Beauvais enumerates them in *Speculum naturale* (Douai, 1624), book XXIV, ch. 54: these included good humor and corpulence.

112 William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum anglicarum*, ed. H. C. Hamilton (London, 1856), I, 71.

113 Paris, *Chronica majora*, III, 623.

signs, it aroused suspicion. Henry VII was described at the moment of his death as *corpore sanus*, showing no trace of imbalance in temperament (*distemperantiae vestigium*).¹¹⁴ The count of Guritia died without warning in 1323, the night following a joyous banquet, and thus surely not of natural causes.¹¹⁵ Likewise, the duchess of Bar met an untimely – and thus not natural – death in 1404, the night following a wedding.¹¹⁶ Henry V's sudden death likewise seemed suspect.¹¹⁷

However, debilitation that lasted for months, as was the case for Philip V, also led to questioning. Slow declines and states of constant frailty frustrated physicians, who therefore preferred to identify pathogenic agents that were unnatural. In his treatise on poison from around 1425, Sante Ardoini de Pesaro maintained that a person afflicted by an ailment that did not respond to the appropriate remedies aroused suspicion of poisoning.¹¹⁸

Sometimes, different sources report sudden death or ongoing debilitation for the same person. The young and vigorous duke of Brabant had thus been debilitated for a relatively long time, and there are accounts that report on the longevity of the duke's malady.¹¹⁹ Some believe that Louis XI's brother, Charles de Guyenne, deceased at the age of 27, was sick for an extended period, while others believe that physicians had expected him to live for a long time.¹²⁰

Patients' appearance, both pre- and post-mortem, as well as their words and behavior, served as grounds for suspicion. Neither Amédée de Savoie, who suffered from a locked jaw due to tetanus (an unfamiliar ailment in 1390), nor Charles VII, afflicted with an oral ulcer, would or could open their mouths to eat: this sufficed to lead to speculations that their deaths resulted from murderous plots that had made them wary of all food.¹²¹ The physical discoloration described by Girolamo

114 Zittau, *Chronique de Königsaal*, 351.

115 Giovanni Villani, *Historie universali de suoi tempi*, Venice, 1559, book IX, ch. 199, I, 409.

116 *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denis*, III, 210.

117 Monstrelet, *Chronique*, I, 95: "In the month of April prior to Easter in the year 1442, the king of England was struck by an apoplexy of which he died suddenly. Nobody said that he had been poisoned" ("Ou moys d'avril avant Pasques l'an III^c XX et deux, le roy d'Angleterre fut frappé d'une appoplecie [apoplexie] dont il mourut sans parler, soudainement. Aucuns disoient qu'il fut empoisonné").

118 Sante Ardoini de Pesaro, *Opus de venenis*, Basel, 1562, 100: "it's useful for a physician to suspect poisoning upon observing that the patient's condition does not improve despite the administration of the appropriate, logically-chosen remedies" ("il est utile au médecin de soupçonner un empoisonnement lorsqu'il voit que l'état du malade ne s'améliore pas malgré l'administration de remèdes appropriés, choisis par la raison").

119 Paul Bonenfant, *Philippe le Bon, sa politique, son action* (Brussels: De Boeck, 1996), 47.

120 Jean de Roye, *Chronique scandaleuse*, ed. B. de Mandrot (Paris, 1896), vol. 2, 285: "expected by all physicians to have a long life" ("extimé de tous medecins de longue vie").

121 For the Amédée VII affair, see Nadia Pollini, *La mort du Prince. Rituels funéraires de la Maison de Savoie (1343–1451)* (Lausanne: Cahiers lausannois d'histoire médiévale 9, 1994) and also, "La morte dei conti e duchi di Savoia fra tre et quattrocento. Discontinuità naturale e continuità dinastica," in *I re nudi. Congiure, assassini, tracolli e altri imprevisti nella storia del potere*, ed. Glauco Maria Cantarella and Francesco Santi, (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1996), 127–141. On the death of Charles VII, Jean Chartier, *Chronique de Charles VII*, ed. A. Vallet de Viriville (Paris, 1858), vol. 3, 112 et seq.

della Torre around 1490 in a work dedicated to the king of Poland was a source of concern.¹²² This was also the case for the swelling of the cadaver: Philippe Mousket indicated that in 1234, Philippe Hurepel, the illegitimate son of Philippe Auguste, was taken by a disease “that caused so much swelling that it was said he had been poisoned.”¹²³ Froissart applied the same explanation for Jehan Lyon in 1379: “During this visit, Jehan Lyon was afflicted quite suddenly by an ailment that caused him to swell up.”¹²⁴ A Burgundian libelle on the death of the dauphin Jean de Touraine in 1417 reports that he “passed from life to death with swelling in the jaws, the lower lip, and the throat, with protruding, bulging eyes, which was a shame to see since this kind of death is one of the ways in which those who have been poisoned [often] die.”¹²⁵ In November 1423, physicians considered dehydration of the victim while still alive, followed by the swelling of the corpse, as signs of poisoning.¹²⁶ However, perfectly natural ailments could lead to the same phenomenon: a defendant in a 1404 trial at the Parlement de Paris argued that “many people who have not been poisoned have swelling when they die.”¹²⁷ However, the very equivocity of such signs fueled the discourse of suspicion.

Other factors for suspicion include details regarding the circumstances under which a death occurred. The chronicle of Gilles li Muisit explains that the death of a guest of King Louis X, followed by that of a dog that had licked the cloths used during the evisceration of the monarch’s corpse, had fomented *mala suspicio*.¹²⁸ The recommendations of Ladislas of Hungary’s physician in 1457 to bury the prince’s body deep into the ground after having disposed of his clothes led many to believe that the cadaver was considered toxic.¹²⁹ The quick removal of the dying person or their remains from view was also suspect. When the duke Thomas of Gloucester died in prison in 1397, this inspired all kinds of suppositions.¹³⁰ In 1450, the death

122 Girolamo della Torre, *De venenis eorumque natura et remediis*, Vatican, BAV, ms. Barb. lat. 229, 26v, ch. on the signs making it possible to know that an individual’s death was the result of poisoning (*Signa quibus scitur mortuum ex potu veneni defecisse*).

123 Philippe Mousket, *Chroniques*, ed. F. de Reiffenberg (Brussels, 1845), vol. 2, 582, v. 28127–8: “which had caused him so much swelling that one would say he had been poisoned” (“dont il fu durement emflés, / Si c’on dist qu’il fu enierbés”).

124 Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. Buchon II, 56.

125 Cited by Yann Grandeau, “Le dauphin Jean de Touraine (1398–1417),” *Bulletin philologique et historique* 2 (1968): 665–722, here 721.

126 French national archives, X²a 18, 11v.

127 French national archives, X²a 14, 216v.

128 Muisit, *Chronique et annales*, 91: “the body was opened, as it were, and his heart covered with a shroud; but a dog that licked this cloth died immediately; also, a friend of said king ate from a dish from which the king had eaten and died right away; it’s because of this that many were suspicious” (“le corps fut ouvert, comme il se disait, et son coeur recouvert d’un linceul; mais un chien qui lécha ce linge mourut aussitôt; il se trouve aussi qu’un familier du dit roi mangea d’un plat dont le roi avait mangé et mourut sur le champ; ce à cause de quoi pesa un mauvais soupçon sur beaucoup”).

129 Hayer, “Krankheit, Sterben und Tod,” 48.

130 *Chronographia regum Francorum*, ed. H. Moranvillé (Paris, 1897), vol. 3, 144: “some say that he was administered a poison that hit and killed him” (“certains disent qu’un poison lui fut administré, dont il fut atteint et mourut”).

of the duke's brother, Gilles de Bretagne, was viewed as suspect.¹³¹ The speedy burial of the victim at a time of prolonged funerary rituals could have come across as a desire to hide a cadaver from prying stares. Louis de France, interred quickly in 1276, provides a case in point,¹³² as does Michelle de France, who was put into the ground the very day that she died, on July 8, 1422.¹³³

Finally, the attitude of those close to the deceased at the time of death was likewise important: the hasty departure of the physician of Amédée VII and that of the confessor of Henry VII, who had given communion to the king, played a decisive role in the formation of suspicions.¹³⁴ This also applies in the case of a nobleman who opposed the Austrian archduke Albert VI and fled Vienna the day after the latter's death in 1463.¹³⁵

A constructed and instrumentalized sentiment

While multiple elements generated suspicion, the sentiment of suspicious deaths was not the spontaneous product of the collective psyche. Broadly, it was generated with specific aims, and it needed incubators and obeyed mechanisms in which manipulation and instrumentalization fully played their part.

The absence of systematic suspicion in the presence of the aforementioned parameters provides initial evidence, *a contrario*, that there was a deliberate will to instrumentalize certain deaths. Social variables and political context played a major role, and the fates of the lowborn did not inspire concern. In response to the sudden deaths of low-status individuals such as barbers, painters, potters, and winemakers, Philippe de Vigneulles wrote, "And thus we observe that in one year, men's bodies are exposed to grave dangers more than in another."¹³⁶ When a death was from the upper classes, however, the death was subject to suspicion. A Germanic chronicle maintained that the kings of Bohemia rarely died of natural causes.¹³⁷ Yet even in the world of the elite, sparks of suspicion did not come out

131 See Franck Collard, "'Et est ce tout notoire encores a present audit pais'. Le crime, la mémoire du crime et l'histoire, du meurtre de Gilles de Bretagne au procès du maréchal de Gié (1450–1505)," in *Le prince, l'argent, les hommes au Moyen Âge*, Mélanges offerts à Jean Kerhervé (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008), 133–143.

132 *Chronique anonyme des rois de France finissant en 1286*, excerpts, *RHGF*, vol. 21 (Paris, 1855), 94: "and was interred very quickly. And the people said he had been poisoned, and likewise the king was highly suspicious" ("et fu en mout briés temps enseveliz. Et distrent les gens qu'il avoit esté empuisonné. Et mesmement estoit li roi en grant soupeçon").

133 Chastellain, *Chronique*, I, 341.

134 Carbonelli, *Gli ultimi giorni*, 252; Franck Collard, "Jacobita secundus Judas. L'honneur perdu des Prêcheurs après la mort d'Henri VII," in *Religions et mentalités au Moyen Âge*, Mélanges Hervé Martin (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003), 221–235.

135 Hayer, "Krankheit, Sterben und Tod."

136 Philippe de Vigneulles, *Chroniques de Lorraine*, ed. Ch. Bruneau (Besançon-Metz, 1932), vol. 3, 363: "And thus great dangers appeared... for humans' bodies more in one year than in another" ("Et ainsy apert les grant dangiers... qui adviengne a corps humains plus en une année que en une aultre").

137 *Cronica de gestis principum a tempore Rudolfi*, 57.

of nowhere. Sometimes they were squelched for reasons of honor or rank. Death was to reflect one's earthly existence: for a good life, there was a good death.¹³⁸ Suggesting that a powerful person died amidst discord in an unclear and unforeseen way was an attack on their honor. For this reason, raising suspicions about a death in the reigning family was widely unknown in the world of the Carolingian annalists, for this would have risked tarnishing the glory of the regime. Leaders were supposed to have "good deaths" even if they were only 20 years old, like Charlemagne's brother Carloman or Charles the Bald's son, Louis III.¹³⁹

Subsequently, notwithstanding the general development observed above, such a "naturalization" of the death of the powerful was still widespread. Significantly, Veronese sources affirm that despite the troubling conditions of his death (violent stomach pain and vomiting), the lord of Verona Cangrande della Scala died in Treviso *sua propria morte* or *morte naturali*.¹⁴⁰ Charles V's thurifer, Christine de Pizan, carefully purged his *Livre des faits et bonnes mœurs* of all unpleasant allusions to the monarch's end, which was met "due to natural death."¹⁴¹ However, there were rumors to the contrary, especially outside the kingdom.¹⁴² The same phenomenon can be observed with the death of the Black Prince in 1376: Walsingham endeavored to attribute it to a proper and edifying death involving no poison or betrayal.¹⁴³ The Monk of Saint-Denis reports that in June 1399, a count died at the duke of Berry's residence, the Hôtel de Nesle, from a sudden onset of apoplexy (*morbo qui apoplexia vocatur repente percussus*). Duke John thought he was asleep with his head resting on his bent arm, and poked fun at him until he realized that he was dead. The duke had just bought his seigneuries, the usufruct of which he had left to the victim for the rest of his life. These circumstances were thus highly suspect. Yet the Monk of Saint-Denis doesn't make the slightest mention of any suspicion

138 See Daniel Schäfer, *Texte vom Tod. Zur Darstellung und Sinngebung des Todes im Spätmittelalter* (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1995), 55–59: sermon on Luke 7:11 by a preacher from the Black Forest interested in the four dimensions of death; Patrick Geary, "Death and Funeral of the Carolingians," in *Death at court*, ed. Karl-Heinz Spiess and Immo Warntjes (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 9–19. The author recalls the words of Saint Augustine: *non potest male mori qui bene vixerit*.

139 Hack, *Alter, Krankheit, Tod*, 102–111.

140 Gian Maria Varanini, "La morte di Cangrande della Scala. Strategie di comunicazione intorno al cadaver," in *Cangrande Della Scala. La Morte e il corredo funebre di un principe nel medioevo*, ed. Paola Marini, Ettore Napione, Gian Maria Varanini (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2004), 11–21.

141 Christine de Pizan, *Livre des faits et bonnes mœurs du sage roy Charles V*, ed. S. Solente (Paris, 1940), trans. E. Hicks and T. Moreau (Paris: Stock, 1997), ch. 15, 141.

142 Thomas Walsingham, *Chronica anglicana*, ed. H. T. Riley (London, 1863), vol. 1, 340–341; Cornelius Zantfliet, *Chronique*, ed. Martène et Durand, *Veterum scriptorum... amplissima collectio*, v. 5 (Paris, 1729), 288–289; Jacques d'Esch, *Die Metzzer Chronik über die Kaiser und Könige aus dem Luxemburger Hause*, ed. G. Wolfram (Metz, 1906), 314: "And likewise the said duke of Anjou poisoned his brother the king of France" ("Item le dit duc d'Angois [Anjou] enherbait le roy de France son frere..."). See Philippe Contamine, "Roi jusqu'au bout. La mort de Charles V, 16 septembre 1380," in *Les derniers jours des rois*, 95–110, here 103.

143 Green, "Masculinity and Medicine," Conclusion.

whatsoever.¹⁴⁴ Here, it is less a question of the victim's honor than that of the duke, his illustrious host. Although she fell victim to a "swift illness," Philip the Bold's widow died without arousing any potentially inappropriate suspicions.¹⁴⁵ According to Cabaret d'Orville, the passing of Louis de Bourbon's second son triggered no suspicion, even though it occurred "at a young age."¹⁴⁶ Pierre de Fénin reported soberly that in the case of the count of Saint-Pol (1415), "he fell ill to a sickness that took his life."¹⁴⁷ In the original part of Héraut Berry's chronicles, there is no mention of rumors about suspicious deaths, as if this *roi d'armes* refused to attribute importance to matters that had nothing to do with the chivalric world. In the chronicle of the papal curia, the same omission implies a similar dynamic, in spite of what was really happening. Burchard, addressing the death of a Genoese merchant who was husband to Innocent VIII's daughter, wrote only: "the day before, he was in good health and cheerful and had dined with the right reverend Cardinal Benventano, and was found today in his bed, dead from apoplexy." As for the physician Theodoric de Coclighen, he briefly notes: "in good health and cheerful the day before, he went to sleep in his bed and was struck suddenly and unexpectedly by an attack of paralysis and was found dead in the morning."¹⁴⁸

For suspicions to arise and then surge along with their accompanying rumors, there needs to be a particular context as well as underlying motives.¹⁴⁹ The political divides and factional strife at the end of the Middle Ages were very accommodating to suppositions that slandered their targets. The sentiment of suspicious death would suggest itself, take shape, spread, and foment by way of communication activities that were daunting because the masses adhered instinctively to the *fama publica*. In 1254, Conrad of Swabia, descendant of Frederick II, deplored this phenomenon when confronted by the germs of suspicion sown by ill-intentioned parties (the papacy in this instance) following the deaths of his young brother Henry and his nephew Frederick.¹⁵⁰

Suspicion entered into perfectly coherent, deliberate procedures for eliminating or discrediting adversaries who were presented as presumed murderers. The death of Louis de France, heir to Philippe III, provided the occasion, following a first round of accusations against his stepmother, the queen Marie de Brabant, for a campaign of suspicion against the royal chamberlain Pierre de la Broce, whose overly high position appalled the barons who succeeded in his undoing.¹⁵¹ The

144 *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denis*, livre XX, ch. 22, II, 750.

145 Monstrelet, *Chronique*, I, 393.

146 Jean Cabaret d'Orville, *Chronique du bon duc Louis de Bourbon*, ed. A.-M. Chazaud (Paris, 1876), 274.

147 Fénin, *Mémoires*, 56.

148 Burchard, *Diarium*, ed. L. Thuasne (Paris, 3 vol., 1884), vol. 2, 507 and 561.

149 For a general view, see Gilles and Elodie Lecuppre, "La rumeur: un instrument de la compétition politique au service des princes de la fin du Moyen Âge," in *La rumeur au Moyen Âge*, 149–175.

150 Matthieu Paris, *Chronica majora*, VI, 302.

151 William C. Jordan, "The Struggle for Influence at the Court of Philip III: Pierre de la Broce and the French Aristocracy," *French Historical Studies* 24 (2001): 439–468; Xavier

same mechanisms were at work in the court of Charles VII, eighteen months after the death of Agnès Sorel. The enemies of Jacques Cœur cast suspicion on the death of the Dame de Beauté so the king would be as “inflamed” as possible against the man in his service.¹⁵² Thomas Basin successfully dismantles the mechanism that was at work to undo the financier.¹⁵³

Suspicious death has also been a remarkable propaganda tool.¹⁵⁴ The conflict between the partisans of the duke of Orléans and those of the duke of Burgundy drew considerably on a widespread sentiment in Paris of the suspicious nature of various deaths. Referring to the “form which [their] deaths took,” the duke John the Fearless used letters (April 1417) to spread the idea that the Armagnac faction had advanced the premature deaths of the two dauphins Louis de Guyenne and Jean de Touraine.¹⁵⁵ When word got out that the duke of Brabant had not died naturally, the duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, was the target. Citing *cui prodest*, certain ill-intentioned people spread the news of a death that had been “hastened” to allow the Burgundian duke to appropriate the duchy neighboring his states. Chastellain indicates that agents of the countess Marguerite de Hainaut, the duke’s rival for the Brabançon inheritance, had spread “various secret rumors.”¹⁵⁶ Louis XI’s enemies also circulated letters suggesting that the brother of the king had “assisted” with the latter’s death at the hands of henchmen.¹⁵⁷

It was a very complicated matter to clear away this kind of collective sentiment. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, political discourse still sufficed; Philippe V himself came to Parlement to pronounce the act of October 9, 1317 and announced that his brother had died of natural causes.¹⁵⁸ In 1346, the son of Henri de Luxembourg, Jean de Bohême, was solicited by the Dominican order to

Hélary, “Trahison et échec militaire: le cas Pierre de la Broce (1278)”, in *La trahison au Moyen Âge. De la monstruosité au crime politique (Ve-XVe siècle)*, ed. Maïté Billoré et Myriam Soria (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes), 2009, 185–195.

152 Escouchy, *Chronique*, II, 284: “he [Charles VII] was told another reason to be angered with the aforementioned Cœur... he was told that Jacques Cœur had poisoned the said Demoiselle, or had her poisoned, which had led her from life into death” (“encore lui fut dite une autre raison pour le [Charles VII] plus enflammer contre ledit Cœur... lui fut dit que Jacques Cœur avait empoisonné ou fait empoisonner la dite Demoiselle, duquel empoisonnement elle alla de vie à trepas”).

153 Basin, *Historia Karoli septimi*, II, 287: “charges made by envious people rather than real... the only thing that inflamed the king against the financier was that the very nasty informers had whispered into the royal ears that the beautiful Agnès had been poisoned” (“charges constituées par des envieux plus que réelles... La seule chose qui enflammait le roi contre l’argentier était que des délateurs très méchants avaient sussuré aux oreilles royales que la dite belle Agnès avait été empoisonnée”).

154 Schäfer, *Texte vom Tod*, 443.

155 Fauquembergue, *Journal*, I, 32.

156 Chastellain, *Chronique*, II, 82.

157 Commynes, *Mémoires*, 257. Appeal published in *Preuves des mémoires de Philippe de Comines*, ed. Lenglet du Fresnoy (Paris, 1747), 199–200.

158 Marquis de Godefroy Ménilglaise, “Mahaut, comtesse d’Artois,” *Mémoire de la société des antiquaires de France* 28 (1864): 181–230, here 208: the king’s death was natural, and not a violent one that would have been caused by external force or a poison.

produce an official statement clearing Bernardin de Montepulciano and his brethren of all suspicion.¹⁵⁹ The physician Bartolemeo de Varignana's deposition before the papacy in 1313 had failed in this regard.¹⁶⁰ The various declarations from the sovereign's entourage had not been any more effective.¹⁶¹ In June 1374, at the request of Charles II de Navarre, the pope Gregory XI published a letter claiming that he knew of no cause other than a natural one for the death of the cardinal Gui de Boulogne, which had transpired just as it did for everybody else.¹⁶² The argument for natural causes countered the suspicions about the Navarrian, who was reputed to have an inclination for using poison. In 1417, a counter-campaign of "detoxification" of opinion was organized by the Armagnacs who were in power at the time. It endeavored to dissipate the rumors that had arisen about the dauphins' deaths. In the Parlement, the libelles of John the Fearless were solemnly refuted on the basis of medical arguments.¹⁶³ Chastellain revived the efforts of Ladislas of Hungary's entourage to squelch suspicion (which in reality also weighed against his master, the duke of Burgundy, hence his insistence), "so that his death not be attributed to human malice but rather just the corruption of his nature due to a pestilential air."¹⁶⁴

These operations, however, did not always sufficiently calm imaginations, since they reduced the matters to banal causes. It was therefore necessary to show that there was nothing hiding behind a suspicious death. This is what Gian Maria Varanini has called "communication about the cadaver."¹⁶⁵ As with Edward II, the remains of Richard II were exposed in London, with the primary aim of having the masses observe the deceased with their own eyes.¹⁶⁶ In 1410, the body of Alexander V

159 *Johannis regis testimonium de morte Heinrici VII. imperatoris*, ed. Zeumer et Salomon, *MGH, Leges*, VIII, *Constitutiones et acta publica imperatorum et regum* (Hanover, 1910–1926), 58.

160 Jean de Saint-Victor, *Memoriale historiarum*, 657; *Chronique d'un dominicain de Parme*, abridged edition L. Delisle, *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale* 35 (1896): 64–65: it was established solemnly before the pope that the emperor Henri VII had not been poisoned but had succumbed to a tumor or anthrax. Jean de Saint-Victor, *Prima vita Clementis V*, ed. E. Baluze, *Vitae paparum avenionensium*, Paris, 1914, I, 22: the rumor persisted "even though the physicians had said before the pope that he had not been poisoned" ("quoique les médecins aient dit devant le pape qu'il n'avait pas été empoisonné").

161 Hermann Komer, *Chronica novella*, ed. J. Schwalm (Göttingen, 1895), 39–40: the sons, brothers to the emperor Henry VII and the prelates of Milan, Genoa, Perugia, Pisa, Lucca, and Strasbourg certified that he had not died due to external violence or deceit, but of a death caused by an internal deficiency.

162 Grégoire XI, *Lettres secrètes relatives à la France*, ed. L. Mirot and H. Jassemin (Paris, 1935), no. 3439, 1098.

163 Fauquembergue, *Journal*, I, 32: decree of the royal procurer against the duke of Burgundy's libelles, which were ripped up in public on July 21.

164 Chastellain, *Chronique*, III, 386: "so that his death not be attributed to human wrongdoing but only to nature being corrupted by a pestilential air" ("adfin que l'on n'attribuast sa mort a mauvaisté d'homme mais tant seulement a œuvre de nature corrompue de mauvais aer").

165 Varanini, "La morte." The author is not referring to the exhibition of the cadaver but rather the strategy of retaining information about the death of the lord of Verona.

166 Evans, *Death of kings*, 127.

was on display for nine days as rumors of poisoning ran rampant after his sudden passing.¹⁶⁷ The very prolonged exhibition of the body of Philippe de Brabant in 1430 was to prove that there was nothing to hide. Suspicions raised about his demise were dispelled by evidence of a death from internal and natural causes. The chronicler Edmond de Dynter indicated that this took place in two stages, as the first medical exam had not been sufficiently convincing. He provides a detailed report on the conclusions made available to the public from the first and the second evaluations.¹⁶⁸ The second, with the opened body in front of the people, demonstrated the desire for publicity essential to the demonstration. The medical experts' formal oath stood in contrast to the less substantial words of the people, and the dissemination of the conclusions throughout Christendom aimed to silence the rumors. The physician's word played an increasingly important role, as noted in 1408 by Cousinot, the detractor of the tyrannicide apologist Jean Petit. For him, the schools of medicine were deserving of more faith than those of theology when determining the cause of death.¹⁶⁹ In this particular domain, death was on the path toward secularization.

Conclusion

According to Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, the word *mors* comes from *mordere*, both because human mortality was the consequence of Adam biting the apple and because death ends life like a bite.¹⁷⁰ It is possible to expand on this image by considering that death gets its teeth not only into the deceased and their loved ones, but gnaws at others' curiosity by eliciting doubts, interrogations, assumptions, and speculations when it affects a person in power and constitutes an especially disturbing event. Suspicion, an integral part of the "sentiment of death" in the Christian Occident – some sources from the Crusades era tend to view the phenomenon as being less pronounced in the Arab-Muslim world – proceeded from a social and cultural development that meant that beginning in the twelfth century and with a clear subsequent escalation, death became subject to interrogations that did not replace but rather added to inquiries into final ends.¹⁷¹ It was no longer a question of obvious divine will, but the malignant, concealed will of humans; this led to a certain criminalization of suspicious death, to the point that the German physician Conrad Vendl, who wrote a treatise on poisons and the plague, claimed

167 Pietro d'Argelata, *Chirurgiae libri sex* (Bologne, 1520), book V, treatise 12, ch. 3, 102v.

168 Dynter, *Chronica ducum Lotharingiae et Brabantiae*, III, 497–8. The Latin text is in the present author's article in *Revue Historique*; see note 1.

169 Master Guillaume Cousinot's response to Jean Petit, cited in Monstrelet, *Chronique*, I, 320.

170 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum libri XX*, XI, 2, 31.

171 Based on the Arab chroniclers assembled in the *Recueil des historiens des croisades* from the nineteenth century, it seems that here natural pathological explanations played a more significant role, and this may be attributed to the more advanced medicalization of Islamic society; this could be a rich subject for a specific study.

to have written his work (1463) to prevent unjust accusations against servants who were slaves to appearance after the passing of their masters.¹⁷²

In the manner of the count of Foix, Gaston Phoebus, many were “quite imaginative,” easily entering “into suspicion” with “great imagination.”¹⁷³ They became more and more inclined to speculate and even create their own stories.¹⁷⁴ Now people were ready to believe that there was “no disclosure of the actual truth” of deaths.¹⁷⁵ The incubators of this sentiment were the cities and courts.¹⁷⁶ It flourished especially during the Late Middle Ages, when there were many who believed that evil, occult forces were undermining society. Far from being instinctive and rash, this sentiment is associated with an interest in understanding and giving a human sense to things in a society saturated with scholastic rationality. Likewise, it is linked to the formation of a public opinion that reacted or was made to react to significant events. Couched in profuse and accusatory terms, suspicion ran counter to the peace in which the dead were to rest, and to the ritual words that were to accompany them. The “joy” of the subjects of the deceased duke Philippe de Brabant reflects their relief upon learning that he had not perished from an “evil death” but a “real natural death.”¹⁷⁷ The natural order was thus frequently invoked for political matters.¹⁷⁸

The liveliness of the sentiment of suspicious death also relates, paradoxically, to the “medicalization” of death, or the increased presence of physicians by deathbeds at the end of the Middle Ages. They added an intellectual treatment to the physical and spiritual treatments of the death being examined; they did not, however, supplant the clerics. While giving rise to thriving suspicions, death also generated an abundance of religious sentiment, with its testamentary, funerary, and artistic displays attesting to a spiritual unease, whereas suspicions reflected worldly concerns and a lively disquiet. The supreme origin remained divine, but its meaning became more complex and matters became murky as new hypotheses suddenly appeared, enriched by medical knowledge and the emergence of opinion that in this way appropriated the death of the Greats.¹⁷⁹

172 Conrad Vendl, *De pestilentia et venenis resistendis*, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, ms. 2304, 25; he speaks of venomous creatures: “there were deaths and numerous infirmities and, unfortunately, suspicions against of honest and trustworthy people, and what was worse was that such cruel deaths were imputed to these innocent people” (“il s’ensuit mort ou autres infirmités multiples et hélas des suspicions contre des gens honnête et dignes de foi, et, chose plus grave encore, on impute à ces innocents une telle mort cruelle”).

173 Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. by the SHF, XII, 83–84.

174 The title of Emilio Mitre Fernández’s book, *Fantasmas de la sociedad medieval: enfermedad, peste, muerte* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2004) evokes fantasms, though he fails to study the fantasms of suspicion.

175 Escouchy, *Chronique*, I, 114.

176 Nonetheless, *Death at court* does not consider the question at hand.

177 Chastellain, *Chronique*, II, 72.

178 See Jacques Krynen’s reflections on this subject in “Naturel. Essai sur l’argument de la nature dans la pensée politique française à la fin du Moyen Âge,” *Journal des Savants* 2 (1982): 169–190.

179 Schäfer, *Texte vom Tod*, Conclusion, attributes these developments to the plague and the great schism, which in some ways destabilized approaches to death; however, these are not structural causes.

10

REGISTERING DEATHS AND CAUSES OF DEATH IN LATE MEDIEVAL MILAN

Ann G. Carmichael

From the early 1450s to the Napoleonic era Milanese civic mortality registers recorded the deaths of Milan's lay and religious residents, and included many others less anchored to the city: recent immigrants, visitors, and pilgrims, soldiers quartered in the city, even refugees of war and famine. Until the early sixteenth century, the names of persons who died in urban hospitals or relief centers appeared in the records as well. Even though Milan's mortality registers resemble other "books of the dead" kept by late medieval Italian cities, they are striking in two respects. First, they report causes of death in all years, for every individual over age two years at death. These causes were supplied in Latin by named physicians and surgeons, rather than in vernacular by gravediggers and/or priests, as we find elsewhere. Cause-of-death reporting did not become a routine practice in most larger European towns and cities until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹ Second, Milanese records list each deceased by name, age, and parish of residence, providing name and surname even with the neonates and a few of the stillborn babies – even aborted fetuses if sex could be determined. How and why did the Milanese go about making such detailed records? What purposes did record-keeping serve?

From an analysis of available late medieval records, this study argues that it is useful to place the documents in the context of regional or territorial state development. Taken together, the causes and names painstakingly recorded in Milanese books of the dead reflect information-gathering at a depth that very few other cities could have contemplated at this time, raising the questions how all that information was collected and recorded, and why such personal, individuating

1 Carlo M. Cipolla, "I libri dei morti," in *Le Fonti della demografia storica in Italia* (Rome: CISP, 1972), 1, pt. 2: 851–952. Cause-of-death reporting was unknown at the national level before around 1800. In general see George C. Alter and A.G. Carmichael, "Classifying the Dead: Toward a History of the Registration of Causes of Death," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 54 (1999): 114–132.

details about the poorest residents mattered to record-keepers. To see the nascent state at work I will address issues related to office praxis, collecting and managing bits of information, archiving that information for unidentified future uses. I will also address Milanese plague surveillance practices, which included postmortem bodily inspections performed by physicians and surgeons who worked for Milan's Health Office (*Magistrato alla Sanità*). Medical assessment of the symptoms and bodily lesions of persons unexpectedly ill (or suddenly deceased) was a more aggressive and intrusive mechanism than other states relied upon to serve as a warning of plague's presence in a city.

Prior studies of urban mortality registers in late medieval Italy emphasize two overarching features. First for historical demographers, they are eclectic, having no standardized content or principles governing which individuals were included. Mortality registers vary from city to city, and are not easily compared with respect to any health or demographic measurement. Second, for historians of medicine and public health, these books are seen as a pragmatic response to recurrent plague. Late medieval urban public health offices were created to provide advanced warning of plague, and to mitigate losses when an epidemic could not be prevented. Milan's books provide the best evidence for such claim. Although *Sanità* certifiers of cause of death made extraordinary observations about the bodily appearances of epidemic victims, the health department's efforts and expertise made no appreciable impact on the standard practices or theories of late medieval medicine. The Sforza health magistracy created a task for late medieval practitioners – physical diagnosis postmortem – where learned medicine offered no guidance. In plague times elite physicians did not want to assume the risks entailed with inspecting cadavers, so they acquired no repeated, experiential basis from which they might generate new questions.² Determining the cause of death for most of those registered in Milanese *Necrologi* increasingly fell to public physicians and surgeons who were little respected by prominent medical practitioners of this era. Thus here as well Milan's civic mortality registers are better seen in the context of the development of territorial states.

Milan was not unique in fashioning a range of plague-specific surveillance strategies that included determination of causes of death, but it was the earliest city to routinize cause-of-death reporting in all years, and for every individual over age two years at death. At stake both then and now is the security and stability of states, needing to preserve the continuity of authority and the power vested in particular individuals, offices, and institutions. A state's inability to protect crucial persons or to prevent the amplification of popular fears in a mortality crisis weakens cohesive social bonds and undermines adherence to traditional order and social values.

- 2 The risks of acquiring infection from the visual inspection of cadavers are quite small, with the dramatic exception of Ebola virus infection; see Oliver Morgan, "Infectious Disease Risks from Dead Bodies following Natural Disasters," *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública* 15, no. 5 (2004): 307–312. On the essential epistemological role that creating a series of clinical or postmortem cases provided for medical modernization see Volker Hess and J. Andrew Mendelsohn, "Case and Series: Medical Knowledge and Paper Technology, 1600–1900," *History of Science* 48 (2010): 287–313.

Determining causes of death in epidemic outbreaks became a fundamental pillar of modern public health and infectious disease control only when medical assessment of causes could be tightly linked to scientifically defensible mechanisms for mitigating or eliminating the threat that infectious diseases present to human communities. Modern epidemiological case-tracing defined and justified an array of interventions likely to reduce further spread and generated new research questions at different temporal and spatial scales.

Overall this study thus argues that Milanese *Necrologi* achieved different objectives for their compilers, men who were employees and representatives of the duke of Milan, the head of an emergent territorial state. Preservation of these records provided a lasting recognition, an archival presence, for humble Milanese citizens, a reason the civic practice survived for nearly four centuries. The registers became a paper cemetery, a final resting place where evidence of one's ephemeral existence could be found. Health department diagnosticians served the state, justifying through the evidence they collected the state's power to intervene in plagues. Their truly extraordinary pre- and postmortem observations on morbid bodies, however, lacked any power to generate challenges to the prevailing views, material interests, and conceptual frameworks of elite medical practitioners.

Milan's civic death registers

The Sforza bureaucracy that created and maintained handwritten *Necrologi*, from 1452 to 1774, supplanted pre-existing local approaches to public health and philanthropy.³ We do not know whether normal annual registers of deaths in Milan were compiled before Francesco Sforza took control of the duchy of Milan in 1450. Most records kept by the *Sanità* and its predecessors have not survived.⁴ Two events contributed to the loss of most of the office archive for the fifteenth century: a deliberate destruction of Visconti-era records stored at the ducal castle (1447) and a fire consuming part of the office and several surrounding buildings (new year's eve, 1502/03).⁵ A ducal decree from 1438 is the earliest known demand for reports of

3 Dante E. Zanetti, "La morte a Milano nei secoli xvi-xviii: appunti per una ricerca," *Rivista storica italiana* 88 (1976): 803–851. The *Necrologi* were first published in 1774, without names of the deceased or names of certifiers. But all deaths had an assigned cause of death (p. 834).

4 Nicoud, "Les Médecins et l'Office de santé: Milan face à la peste au xv^e siècle," *Cahier du GRHis*, n. 16, ed. Anne-Marie Flambard-Héricher (Presses universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2006), 55–59, believes that the extraordinary feature of Milan's public health management was the full involvement of Milanese physicians and surgeons, beginning with the lordship of Gian Galeazzo Visconti (d. 1402). She thinks that all aspects of public health in the city were "medicalized," that health office records were kept throughout this century, and that extant evidence about its operations reflects only correspondence kept in ducal repositories from 1450 forward.

5 In 1447 a mob acting under orders from the "Ambrosian Republic" (governing consortium of urban aristocrats) razed the ducal castle in Milan where many city-related documents were stored. Gregory Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court: Milan under Galeazzo Maria Sforza* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1994), 16–17; and Franca

illness, for everyone in Milan's city and suburbs not under the care of a College of Medicine physician. Tuscan mortality registers were much earlier, beginning in the 1370s or 1380s.⁶

We have evidence of the structure of Milanese plague management before the mid-fifteenth century, times when the Visconti had direct obligation. Plague management prior to the Sforza had three components, all the invented or re-designed policies of Duke Gian Galeazzo Visconti (d. 1402). Surveillance was orchestrated from an office (the *Ufficio delle bollette*) within the ducal court, headed by a ducal commissioner who collected information of the whereabouts of plague in Lombardy.⁷ The commissioner issued certificates permitting travel and bans on areas where plague was reported, then imposed road closures and river patrols to prevent the spread of plague within the ducal domain.⁸ In Milan these commissioners collaborated with city physicians and surgeons when an epidemic threatened. When plague was suspected, attending physicians were to notify the commissioner "in writing."⁹ However, because many residents were not served by

Leverotti, "L'archivio dei Visconti signori di Milano," *Reti Medievali Rivista* 9 (2008): 1–22, at page 2, suggesting the destruction may have been limited to fiscal documents. And see Antonia Pasi Testa, "Alle origini dell'Ufficio di Sanità nel Ducato di Milano e Principato di Pavia," *Archivio Storico Lombardo* [hereafter *ASL*], ser. 10, anno 102 (1976): 376–386, for discussion of plague controls and health officers under the Visconti. The second record destruction of 1502/03 is noted at the beginning of the death register for that year. Archivio di Stato Milano [hereafter *ASMi*], Fondo Popolazione, parte antiqua [hereafter *Popolazione*, p.a.], cartella [hereafter *cart.*], 80. A preface to the first entries, 31 December 1502, records that a shoemaker [*zoccolaio*], Magister Johannes de Dexio, his wife, his 10-year-old daughter and a household servant died in this fire, likely in a neighboring house in (each case by *casu fortuito vix in igne*). All were members of the center city parish of San Michele sub domus. The health office was near this parish, in the Campo Sancto (burial grounds) behind the Duomo; see E. Motta, "I morti in Milano dal 1452 al 1552," *ASL* 18 (1891), 244.

- 6 Florentine books of the dead are the most famous of surviving registers, invented in the wake of the Black Death and its punishing recurrences to monitor the activities of communally funded gravediggers. See Raffaele Ciasca, *Statuti dell'arte degli medici e speciali* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1922), 286: a 1375 amendment to 1349 guild statutes, "... because of the infinite extortions that gravediggers continually commit in burying bodies...they should be placed under the control of the *arte degli spetiali*". Providing larger, essential context and further archival work on Florentine statutes, see Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families*, 260–279. David Herlihy, "Deaths, Marriages, Births, and the Tuscan Economy (ca. 1300–1550)," in Ronald D. Lee, ed., *Population Patterns in the Past* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 135–164, assesses the extent to which the *Grascia morti* and later *Libri dei Morti* were part of a very early vital registration effort. My *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986) analyzes the books' content as a reflection of health and disease patterns.
- 7 Pasi Testa, "Alle origini dell'Ufficio di Sanità"; Giuliana Albini, *Guerra, Fame, Peste: crisi di mortalità e sistema sanitario nella Lombardia tardomedievale* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1982), 19–27, 84–90; and Marilyn Nicoud, "Les Médecins et l'Office de santé," 49–74.
- 8 Aldo Bottero, "La peste in Milano nel 1399–1400 e l'opera di Gian Galeazzo Visconti," *Atti e memorie dell'Accademia di storia dell'arte sanitaria* 8 (1942):17–28.
- 9 Nicoud, "Les Médecins et l'Office de santé," 54–55, quoting a February, 1400 ducal provision. Nicoud holds that the medical community actively collaborated with the Duke during this time period, shaping the legislation, surveillance architecture, and

healers at the end of life, beginning in 1400 or 1401, the elders of each parish were obligated to report each new case of plague to the special (plague-time) ducal commissioner.¹⁰ The Visconti adapted a thirteenth-century communal governing structure, relying on *anziani* (elders) to report all newly suspected cases of plague.¹¹ Because the term *anziani* could also apply to secular, district elders, there may have been geographically overlapping jurisdictions, with better surveillance coverage. Finally, the Visconti demanded isolation of the plague-stricken outside the Milanese city walls. During the great plague of 1399–1400, Gian Galeazzo designated a Visconti villa at Cusago, five miles southwest of the city, as an isolation site for Milan's plague victims.¹²

During the three-year interregnum between the last Visconti duke and the new Sforza dynasty, Milan's "Ambrosian Republic" needed to assume plague protection activities that the Visconti had previously supplied. Plague in Milan's outskirts appeared throughout 1449, leading Milanese aristocrats to create their own health surveillance committee called the *Deputati ad conservandam sanitatem* (office of health preservation), and designated two of its members as *Offitiales super peste*. Parish elders, physicians, barbers, and surgeons all had to report new cases of illness to these *Deputati* daily and in writing. For any death the office then issued a burial license, required for interment in a churchyard or cemetery.¹³ The *Offitiales super peste* supervised plague provisions, hiring boatmen and medical personnel in order to first remove paupers, then later on the ill, to the villa at Cusago.¹⁴ The *Deputati* meanwhile

obligatory medical services even for those expelled to plague confinement zones in the surrounding countryside.

- 10 Ibid., 55, noting reiteration of the illness-reporting regulations in 1438, when the obligation was extended to barbers and apothecaries. Albini, *Guerra, fame, peste*, 86, believes that daily Milanese reports of new plague cases resulted in lists as early as 1400, but became lists of all illnesses by 1438. If an individual was not in the care of a physician in the city College of Medicine, then the head of the affected household was obliged to report to the parish elder.
- 11 Also seen as *antiani* or *anciani*. On the commune-era neighborhood organization of authority, including the often inherited position of elder, see Evelyn Welch, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 35–41; and on the Ambrosian Republic (the name the oligarchy gave themselves) stressing a return to twelfth-century governance, pp. 44–45. On neighborhood reporting in the plague of 1400, see Albini, *Guerra, fame, peste*, 84–89.
- 12 Nicoud, "Les Médecins et l'Office de santé," 56–57; and Albini, *Guerra, fame, peste*, 82–83.
- 13 Carlo Decio, *La peste in Milano nell'anno 1451 e il primo lazzeretto a Cusago* (Milan: LF Cogliati, 1900), 11–12; and Giuliana Albini, *Guerra, fame, peste*, 121–122. Created in 1449, the Ambrosian Republic committee was called *Deputati ad conservandam sanitatem*.
- 14 Aldo Bottero, "La peste in Milano nel 1399–1400 e l'opera di Gian Galeazzo Visconti," *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia di Storia dell'Arte Sanitaria* 8 (1942): 17–28; and Luca Beltrami, "Il lazzeretto di Milano," *ASL* 9 (1882): 403–441. On statecraft under the Visconti, now see Andrea Gamberini, "Milan and Lombardy in the era of the Visconti and the Sforza," in Gamberini, ed., *A Companion to Late Medieval and Early Modern Milan: The Distinctive Features of an Italian State* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 19–42. On Visconti plague management see Pasi Testa, "Alle origini dell'Ufficio di Sanità"; and Carlo Cipolla, *Public Health and the Medical Profession in the Renaissance* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 15–18, 21–22.

devised a new approach to a long-standing conflict with church authorities over the use of church properties in lodging and caring for plague victims. They approached financing for crisis intervention by imposing broad structural reforms of urban hospitals and charitable consortia. Such institutions had become rich, disorganized, and fully incapable of serving as social safety networks during emergencies.¹⁵

The twinned approach to urban plague control – an extramural isolation hospital and intramural surveillance through daily reports from city and suburban elders – was transformed under Francesco Sforza's leadership. He entered the city in the early spring, 1450, entraining cartloads of grain to relieve dire famine. Sforza promised the Milanese people that he would build a great hospital, the *Ospedale Maggiore*, and it indeed became his lasting and best-loved achievement, still today a significant health care facility.¹⁶ He brought plague isolation facilities closer to the city to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. His plans eventually resulted in an imposing lazaretto outside the eastern gate. Not actually completed and used until 1512, when the French occupied the city, the lazaretto became another lasting Sforza bulwark, surviving to the 1880s.¹⁷

From the moment Sforza displaced the governing aristocrats in 1450, he had to deal with a rapidly worsening plague crisis within the city. Creating a new *Sanità* office, he followed the Ambrosian approach (mandatory written notifications of illnesses and deaths, parish by parish), and relied on both local and Sforza-appointed men to collect these daily notifications.¹⁸ Francesco Sforza wanted daily death updates, lists that were sent to the ducal chancery that directly managed affairs of state. Whether the daily reports were seen by the dukes themselves or instead by functionaries, the requirement elevated to state importance a laborious and risk-taking clerical work in times of plague. Thus Sforza did not actually change existing policy, instead he made a commitment to massive record collection, translating what may have been ephemeral lists of the dead into a permanent city record and archive.¹⁹ That commitment proved important to state-building. Plague expanded

15 Welch, *Art and Authority*, 117–136.

16 Giuliana Albin, "La gestione dell'Ospedale Maggiore di Milano nel Quattrocento: un esempio di concentrazione ospedaliera," in *Ospedali e città: l'Italia del Centro-Nord, xiii-xvii secolo*, ed. A.J. Grieco and L. Sandri (Florence: Casa editrice Le Lettere, 1997), 157–178; Franca Leverotti, "Ricerche sulle origini dell'Ospedale Maggiore di Milano," *ASL* 107 (1981): 77–113; and Welch, *Art and Authority*, *loc. cit.*, and notes 294–297.

17 The location and land for the lazaretto was not even decided until after Francesco Sforza died, with the bequest of a Milanese nobleman. See Luca Beltrami, "Il lazaretto di Milano," *Ar* *ASL* 9 (1882): 403–441. Welch, *Art and Authority*, is the best modern source on Sforza's use of great edifices to reinforce his authority and right to rule; a third great investment was also directly geared to the aspirations of the populace – the Cathedral. Made infamous in Alessandro Manzoni's novel *I Promessi Sposi* (1822), the lazaretto was razed later in the nineteenth century, generating architect Beltrami's study of its construction.

18 Federico Del Tredici, "Lombardy under the Visconti and the Sforza," in *The Italian Renaissance State*, ed. Andrea Gamberini and Isabella Lazzarini (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 157–158.

19 Francesco Senatore, *'Uno mundo de carta': Forme e strutture della diplomazia sforzesca* (Naples: Liguori, 1998), 251, and the helpful review of this work by Vincent Ilardi, *Speculum* 76 (2001): 519–521.

murderously in the spring of 1451, and the aristocrats who had created the scaffolding and policies for death reporting were now desperate to leave the city. Lower-level district and parish officials and Sforza's *Sanità* remained behind, performing together the lugubrious work that led to permanent death registers. The new health office assumed the added task of composing and dispatching daily updates, to the duke himself or to his Secret Council, waiting out the plague at the monastery of Chiaravalle.

Hostilities persisted between the Sforza dynasty and some factions of Milanese aristocrats until the Spanish took over in 1535. In the later fifteenth century, Sforza's sons faced greater opposition than did Francesco, and were further tested during recurring intervals of great plagues and famines. But the public health office that Francesco Sforza created rarely became a target of political and factional divides, despite occasionally direct and arbitrary interference by Sforza princes. Sforza's public health bureaucracy turned local, temporary committees mustered to repulse plague into a physically separate Milanese office with its own chancery and dedicated staff. The success of the Sforza health office began with his administration's assumption of both traditional illness and death reporting practices as well as the responsibility for traditional plague management across the duchy.

Recognition through registration

It is easy to understand why Milanese aristocrats would welcome Sforza's men during the desperate months of plague in 1451–1452.²⁰ But why would a half-hostile elite and their clients, the powerful *anziani* within city districts, permit the office to intrude once the threat of plague had passed? The *Necrologi* records themselves testify to such effective collaboration of *Sanità* personnel within the centuries-old structure of communal governance, and with the city's pre-existing hospital and medical communities. I suggest that the Milanese themselves, both rich and poor, were reassured that bound registers acknowledged their existence and personhood, even when that recognition only came at death. Registration also reflected ordered governance and addressed a terror commonly expressed in medieval plague accounts: anonymity at burial and the abandonment of civic and religious rituals marking one's passing.

Simon Szreter and Keith Breckenridge point to two features of registration systems that help to explain the success of Milan's civic death lists, even though Szreter and Breckenridge are mainly concerned with state registration of living persons in the modern era.²¹ First, registration processes create interlocking obligations and rights, as with property titles and tax obligations. Here it is significant that the Ambrosian

20 Nicoud, "Les Médecins et l'Office de santé," 61–62, points out how quickly Sforza health office personnel took over the dangerous work of examining plague suspects, whether sick or deceased, relieving the parish elders of such obligation.

21 Simon Szreter and Keith Breckenridge, "Recognition and Registration: The Infrastructure of Personhood in World History," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 182 (2012): 4–5.

Republic governors prohibited priests and gravediggers from burying anyone without seeing a written burial license from their health deputies. Retaining this requirement, Sforza-era registration reflected an entitlement to bury an individual in a parish or communal cemetery.²² Second, the practice of registration spawns bureaucratic infrastructures for recording information and standardizing strategies for identification. Paper systems of registration create models and practices in recording and retrieving information, as we see in the standardized format of the Milanese *Necrologi* discussed below. Continuity in record-keeping over time reflects as much a bureaucratic success, as it does much-maligned bureaucratic inertia.

The death registers thus tacitly illustrate a Milanese right to a social identification in official civic records. To assess the extent to which Milanese deaths were reported by name, I used complete annual registrations available from 1503 through 1505. The health magistracy by that time operated smoothly as a semi-autonomous bureaucracy, unruffled by significant political upheavals, repeated and disastrous famines and plagues, and even, in these very years, an occupying army quartered in and around the Castello Sforza. The register for 1503 begins as precisely it did in 1453, a half century earlier.²³ Among 11,156 deaths entered during these three years, just 86 individuals were not identified by name. Even among these anonymous 86 persons, most were characterized in some way (e.g. a beggar woman; a Scotsman; a German thug fighting in the Gaeta forces).²⁴ Eighteen of these 86 were adults whose age was also unknown.²⁵ A further 467 persons (4.2 percent) were identified only by a first name (thus with no family name or indication of geographical origin), but 95.7 percent of these were young children who died in the foundling hospital of San Celso. The clerk left a blank space to fill in a name for 47 of the 11,156 entries, suggesting he anticipated further information was forthcoming.²⁶

22 Albini, *Guerra, fame, peste*, 89. Many late medieval death registers were actually burial registers, because registration generated a burial license, and a payment to the burier and/or priest. See Cipolla, "I libri dei morti," 854–856.

23 Paper-based record-keeping, typically in vernacular and ephemeral in purposes, appeared in the century preceding the Black Death; see M.T. Clanchy, "Parchement and Paper: Manuscript Culture 1100–1500, in S. Eliot and J. Rose, eds., *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 194–206. However, paper was not a necessary medium for the creation of vast Latin archives, as Joëlle Rollo-Koster's study of the Avignon Papacy has recently shown. Over the fourteenth century, the papal chancery produced half a million documents, employing over 500 scribes, assistants, and archivists. See Rollo-Koster, *Avignon and its Papacy, 1309–1417* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 165–167. The 1503 book begins by noting the fire consuming part of the office. See above note.

24 December 8, 1503: *quedam mendicha*; January 3: *quidam schozensis*; February 4, 1504: *quidam teutonichus sive falcus de Gayeta*. Here *falcus* seems to be used as a slur, hence my translation.

25 February 6, 1505, "another boy beggar" (*quidam alius puer mendicus*); or January 28, 1504, "another German" (*quidam alius Teutonichus*). Both died in hospital. Only one child was entered without noting his/her age.

26 Fifteen percent (7 of 47) with a blank space in the record were missing the deceased's first name. For 11 of the 11,156 entries I lacked a digitized image to consult in this analysis.

While not all persons carried family names, clerks at the *Sanità* were strikingly dedicated to identifying each deceased. Not uncommonly we find entries such as “*Johannes de Milano filius alterius Johannis carretoni*” [“Giovanni of Milan, son of another Giovanni, cart-driver”]²⁷ or “*Bernardinus filius Francisci de Castilione de Marliano*.”²⁸ Anonymous famine refugees were cited as beggars (*mendicus/a*), and many soldiers or travelers were known only by territory of origin (thus *teutonicus*, *gallus*, *alamanus*, *francigenus*). But almost everyone else was listed by name and surname, including several foreign soldiers. The first year, 1503, included many residual plague deaths from a minor epidemic in 1502. The last year of the subset, 1505, was a year of severe famine throughout northern and central Italy, provoking mass refugee flows to all urban centers. In other words, these were not relaxed times when clerical staff time was available for atypical attention to detailed record-keeping.

Milan's *Sanità*: extramural and intramural procedures

The health department had a central bureaucratic office hub, with small mountains of paper and dutiful office clerks creating these documents. Beyond the guards at the office door, information bearers traveled along the spokes of a great wheel of information. One component of their routine activities, the bound registers of deaths in the city and suburbs of Milan, were the finished product of a sophisticated secular bureaucracy. In their material aspects these health office records reflect a rapidly expanding and transformative world of paper familiar to historians who use fifteenth-century diplomatic archives.²⁹

The intramural and extramural office practices mirror activities aligned to the creation and elaboration of early territorial states, collecting and archiving all manner of information that could impinge on the decisions of those in power.

27 Giovanni of Milan, 10-day-old “son of another Giovanni,” a porter or cart-driver who died in the parish of San Carpofo, Porta Cumana district. ASMi, *Popolazione, p.a., cart.* 80, at July 26, 1504. Even with a female head of household, as this entry January 29, 1504: Antonia filia alterius Antonie de Berlascho, a six-day-old girl in the parish of San Giovanni *supra murum*, district of porta Vercellina.

28 Bernardino was a 10-month-old child in the parish of Santo Stefano, porta Romana district, who died July 21, 1505; another correction made by the clerk illustrates that the relationship to the head of household was also important: here “*filia*” (daughter) was crossed out and replaced with “*ablaticha*” (granddaughter): *Catelina ablaticha Ambrosii de Blanchis*, a 15-month-old who died August 27, 1505, in the parish of Sancti Naborre e Felice, district of porta Vercellina. Even more frequently we find nicknames added, how a person (in this case the head of household) was known in his neighborhood: *Elisabet uxor Petri Antonii de Rovertis dictus ‘Frater Faxolus’* [PierAntonio was thus called “brother bean.”] His 60-year-old wife died April 21, 1505, of “*ydroke asclite*” (dropsical ascites) in the parish Sant’Eufemia, porta Ticinese.

29 Paul Marcus Dover, “Deciphering the Diplomatic Archives of Fifteenth-Century Italy,” *Archival Science* 7 (2007), 297–316. In general see Ann Blair’s introductions to two collections of recent historical studies of early modern archives, *Archival Science* 10 (2010): 195–200; and A. Blair and Jennifer Milligan, *Archival Science* 7 (2007): 289–296; also Eric Ketelaar, “Records Out and Archives In: Early Modern Cities as Creators of Records and as Communities of Archives,” *Archival Science* 10 (2010): 201–210.

Francesco Sforza, who styled himself “lord of the news” (*signore de novelle*),³⁰ created a state-of-the-art chancery, claiming that he was merely performing the obligations that prior dukes had assumed, and with tools of governance that they had invented. He fashioned his health office on earlier models. But the pedestrian staff routines and correspondence reveal how profoundly Sforza state administrative infrastructures were reinvented. Through the minutiae of daily paperwork, the operations and objectives of an emergent state transformed a patchwork of Visconti and older communal offices.

Record formatting

The basic appearance of entries in the few surviving registers of the 1450s showed essentially the same record layout used a half-century later. Table 10.1 shows the very first day of surviving *Necrologi* registers, Friday, July 21, 1452.³¹

All three listed deaths were plague cases “in the judgment of Catelano” (*iudicio Catelano*), referring to Health Office physician Giovanni Catelano.³² The right-hand column of the record says “s/he died” (*decessit*). Catelano’s plague diagnoses entailed the pre- and postmortem inspection of bodies, giving his diagnoses a status as evidence that could only be contested by other university-trained physicians, had they been willing to do this dangerous work.³³ The left-hand column indicates where the individual resided at the time of death, with the first “p” referring to a principal city gate – thus pR referred to *porta Romana*; pT, to *porta Ticinese*. The 29-year-old woman who died “*ad locum Montanee*” had lived, as the record shows,

TABLE 10.1 Deaths registered July 21, 1452, in the Milanese *Necrologi*

pR p S. Nazarii	Caterina fq [fu quondam] Christofori de Borronis, annorum xvijj, a pestifero dragonzalo in Inguine sinistre, iudicio Catelano, casus novus	decessit
Ad locum Montanee	Rosina de Leporinis, annorum xxviiiij, a pestiffero dragonzello in Inguine dextro, iudicio Catelano, die xvii Jullij, pR, p S Calumeri	decessit
pT p S Effumie	D. Lucia uxor d. Alesij de Aliprandis, annorum L, ab antrace in coxa sinistra de pestiferis, iudicio Catelano die xij Jullii	decessit

30 Senatore, ‘Uno mundo de carta’, 251, and Ilardi, *Speculum* 76 (2001), 519.
31 ASMi, *Popolazione, p.a., cart. 73*, by date. Nicoud, “Les Médecins et l’Office de santé,” 60, found earlier occasional daily reports of deaths in Sforza state papers of 1451.
32 Catelano came to Milan with Sforza, becoming a new “foreign” member, an indication of his lesser status, inducted into the Milanese College of Medicine on April 19, 1450. See Luigi Belloni, “La medicina a Milano sino al Seicento,” in *Storia di Milano*, v. 11 (Milan: Fondazione Treccani degli Alfieri, 1958), 607–609; and Nicoud, “Les Médecins et l’Office de santé,” 59–60, who located the earliest document (1451) showing Catelano’s appointment as *fiscus epidemie*.
33 Indeed there are some reports filed by prominent Milanese practitioners, based exclusively on urinalysis and on description of the patient’s symptoms. I provide translation of one such contested case in my “Epidemics and State Medicine in Fifteenth-Century

in the *porta Romana* district. The “mountain” where she died was a temporary confinement zone for plague victims, located, as it happens, in this same city district.³⁴ The second “p” in the left-hand column referred to “*populus*,” meaning the parish church where the victim worshipped. The middle column carries personal information about victims, identified by name, surname, age, cause(s) of death, and certifier(s) of cause. The two newly identified plague victims in this report worshipped in the basilicas of *Sant’Eufemia* and *San Nazaro*. Reports of the very next day, July 22, 1452 (Table 10.2) show that registration was not restricted to the privileged, to adults, or to those places and households where plague was suspected. Only one of the six reported July 22 died of plague.

Close analysis of this first *Necrologi* register, beginning in late July 1452 and recording 865 deaths over the remainder of the year, suggests that Sforza personnel assigned to the *Sanità* worked with existing district and parish Milanese authorities

TABLE 10.2 Deaths registered July 22, 1452, in the Milanese *Necrologi*

pN p Bertolome	Dna. Petra uxor Mafioli de Busero, annorum 60, a dolore stomaci anticho et ventris tumore, cum sincopali, Iudicio Catelano, die xv Julii	decessit
pT p Lorenzi foris	Bertolameus filius quondam Petrus de Porzellis, annorum iij, et eticus erat iudicio Catelano die xvij Julii	decessit
pR p Nazari	Magdalena filia Maioli Prandoni, annorum trium, ex vermibus, iudicio magistri Mathei de Busti	decessit
pO pls Babile foris	Petrus filius Christofori de Manazii dierum iij sine suspensione, relatione anziani	decessit
pT p s Michaelae subtus domus	Lucia de Braschis, annorum xx, ex fluxu ventris diurno cum febre continuo, iudicio magistri Raphaelis de Vicomercato	decessit
pT pls Marie Beltrade	Johannes de Comitibus, annorum L, a bubone in inguine sinistre, iudicio Catelano die xviii Julii	decessit

Milan,” in *Medicine from the Black Death to the French Disease*, ed. Roger French et al. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 229–231. The attending physician claimed that he knew about the swelling in the man’s axilla, but the patient swore to him that it was not painful and had long been present. Catelano and the Health Office surgeon together inspected the man’s body pre- and postmortem, finding a suppurating abscess in the left axilla and purplish and black measles, top to toe. The physical findings served to override the initial diagnosis: this was plague.

- 34 Giuliana Albini, *Guerra, fame, peste*, 72; and Carlo Decio, *La Peste in Milano nell’ anno 1451 e il primo lazzeretto a Cusago* (Milan: L.F. Cogliati, 1900), 21–23. The facilities are variously referred to as a house (*domus montanae*) to houses (*domibus montanae*) and *della Montagna*. Decio, an archivist at the *Ospedale Maggiore*, believed that the area was elevated by rubble after the destruction of a fourteenth-century Visconti castle, and that it was located in the general area where the *Ospedale* was later constructed. In the plague of 1451–1452, Sforza’s ducal *Consiglio* met outside the city, at the Abbey of Chiaravalle. By 1452, persons working at the “mountain” were required to wear a yellow cross on both the front and back of their garments. This area was not used for plague victims during any subsequent epidemic in Milan.

to produce a list of those who died. Among the deaths from July 22, the elder of San Babila church relayed the death of a three-day-old neonate, identified by both his christened name and by his father's name. The Health Office added that his death was "without suspicion [of plague]," but the elder likely supplied the other details: the family resided outside the city walls [indicated by the word *foris*, in the left-hand column].³⁵ Mortality registers are careful to note whether the deceased physically resided outside the city gates, even when the parish where he or she worshipped was located inside the city walls, and the simple inclusion of *foris* (outside) or *intus* (within) for several of the large urban churches serving the working poor was significant for the Milanese.³⁶

Another interesting aspect of the early registers appears in the second entry of this second table: Bertholomeo son of the former Pietro dei Porzelli, aged three years, was hectic (*eticus erat*), "in Catelano's judgment 17 July." Here the record indicates that when the office was initially notified, five days before the little boy died, the Health Office physician visited the household. Whether he talked with persons there or actually inspected the child, the record does not say.

Paperwork prior to a permanent register

On August 5, 1452, the deaths of two different 40-year-old men illustrate how complex the interim paperwork management of illness and death reports must have been, whether kept at the office or held by the certifier until the individual either died, recovered, or survived long enough to exclude a diagnosis of plague. The first man died of "dropsical ascites" (*hydrope asclite*), a diagnosis Catelano made more than two months earlier, on May 22. The other man died of a "pestiferous and lethal bubo in the right buttock" (*a pestiffero mortifferoque bubone in dextra coxa*), first noted the day before he died.

Death registrations from 1452 and 1453 frequently provide such dated, pre-mortem diagnoses and in this one respect differ from later records. By the 1460s registers instead record the length of time an individual had been ill. Most likely, Catelano and other public physicians and surgeons (including here those working in Milanese hospitals) carried around some kind of notebook or working reminder lists to verify when the head of household had reported an ill person at his or her residence. We see as much from a letter of June 5, 1468 that the *Sanità* health commissioner, Hector Marchese, wrote to the duke (Galeazzo Maria Sforza).

35 Remnants of the Redefosso can now be seen as part of the surviving "Spanish Wall" built in the mid-sixteenth century. It replaced a deep defensive moat built in the 1310s to impede a papal army, and was used to mark the outer boundary of the urban suburbs, which were called the *Corpi Santi*. On Milan's urban topography see Gigliola Soldi Rondinini, "Milano tra xiv e xvi secolo," in *Florence and Milan: Comparisons and Relations*, ed. Nicolai Rubenstein, Sergio Bertelli, and Craig Hugh Smyth (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1989), 2: 167.

36 On the structure of death registers linked to urban/suburban geography, see Albini, "La mortalità in un grande centro urbano," 125–127.

Trying to explain why the office had not been able to control the spread of plague during the early spring, Hector reviewed the timeline of the principal cases of plague from March to June, then explained: "I often went around with Catelano and talked with other College physicians, asking them how all this was happening. How could it be that in many cases these same physicians *had reports of illnesses in their hands*, but did not understand the maladies as plague?" (emphasis mine).³⁷ The passage suggests that a clutch of illness reports resided with the extramural office staff who verified causes of illness and death.

Paper fueled the extramural and intramural worlds of Milan's Health Office. Meanwhile a small group of certifiers and administrators anchored both worlds. *Sanità* correspondence during plague times involved messengers transporting reports and updates to the dukes and governing elite, all of whom took refuge outside the city and its suburbs. Letters from Hector Marchese to the duke in 1468 occasionally offer a "real-time" picture of the almost breathless pace of news breaking into the calmer central operations post. Clerks, or perhaps the commissioner himself, turned oral reports into temporally precise stories, pinpointing plague connections within the city. Letters detailed contaminated locations in ways that the duke would appreciate. Perhaps these letters drew on animated intramural office discussions, as we see with this May 7 letter.³⁸ Hector wrote to the duke:

After we wrote to your Excellency this morning, the case described below occurred, reported by Magister Giovanni Catelano. He saw a man named Antonio da Robio, who worked in the barber shop of Magister GiovanPietro Mori, barber, whose shop is in the piazza della Corte, across from the windows of the Magistri del Entrate [toll collectors at the city gates]. The man [Antonio] is sick with the plague. He has a sharp [*aspera*] fever but has not yet manifested any sign of plague. Antonio lives in the parish of Sancto Simplicianino across from the house of Don Baldesare Capra. Up until now we had no idea where his disease came from. We suspect that he bled or otherwise attended some infected person. He is 19 years old. Near there [where Antonio worked?] Lucia, the 14-year-old daughter of the former Gulielmo Teoldi, died of plague accidents first appearing on Tuesday.³⁹ Before that day she had not shown any sign, but Magister Giovanni Catelano suspected she had

37 An abbreviated translation of ASMi, *Miscellanea Storica* [hereafter *Misc. Stor.*] cart. 2, n. 70. I discuss evidence from this plague in my "Contagion Theory and Contagion Practice in Fifteenth-century Milan," *Renaissance Quarterly* 44 (1991), 213–256, with the full quote on p. 245. Catelano's response was that they were trying to diagnose plague from looking at the patients' urine.

38 I preserve *magister* rather than use "master," because the English word does not well convey the distinction made when it applied to a physician or trained surgeon. *Magister* could also refer to an accomplished apprentice-trained artisan. On Catelano see n. 31.

39 "Accidents" are symptoms, or more specifically "concomitant events," usually to a fever. See Luke Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine: the Art of Healing from Head to Toe* (Santa Barbara, CA and Oxford, UK: Praeger, 2013), 44–49. I thank Luke for his direct help in translating the unusual medical term "*febre aspera*."

plague. She lived on the street called Cinque Vie, that is, near San Sepolcro, in the parish of San Matteo in Moneta. While writing this letter, Brunoro Vilano, on behalf of his parish elder, delivered to us a notice that his 38-year-old female servant is sick with the plague, and has expelled [*butato*] a plague carbuncle [*carbone*] in the right buttock, saying that she fell ill yesterday and he didn't know where she had acquired the infection. This Brunoro lives in the street by the stalls of Count Giovanni Borromeo, across from the house where the banker Marcho of Galara is staying. And we had Magister Giovanni go to see her, and he says the same thing. ...⁴⁰

In this chatty account, brimming with enthusiasm, the office believed they had solved an important puzzle about intra-city plague spread. At the same time we learn that the parish elders or their servants carried notices to the office, at which point a staff physician or surgeon would be dispatched to assess any illness or death deemed suspicious in one or another particular. Many people were thus out-and-about as plague cases multiplied in the city, doubtless a reassurance to poorer Milanese that someone was in charge. In this update the duke was also reassured that the principal physician of the Health Office, Catelano, was sent back out to double check reported information. Clerks, likely in different work shifts, recorded the substance of both oral and written reports brought to the office about deaths and worrisome illnesses occurring at various places in the city.

Despite plague popping up over the city and suburbs throughout the spring of 1468, surviving letters from this year came from the Health Office to the Secret Chancery (in town, at the Castello). Some may have been sent directly to the Secret Council (at the abbey of Chiaravalle, on the fringe of the southeastern city suburbs), or to the Duke, moving around the domain. All these are just the inter-office memos and copies of documents generated by clerks serving at the *Sanità*. Making their way to the office, sometimes by being forwarded by the Secret Chancery, were letters sent to the office from informants, guards, Sforza partisans residing in rural areas, and directives from the duke himself. Letters from physicians and others in her entourage report the health of the dowager duchess, mingled among the bundles of papers now residing in boxes of miscellaneous Sforza correspondence.⁴¹ Familiar evidence of the minutiae generated within state

40 ASMi, *Misc. Stor.*, cart. 2, n. 15, also specifying the hour when this letter was written ("hora xvij").

41 On the nineteenth-century re-sorting of Sforza state papers that detached bundled letters from their original, fifteenth-century contexts see Dover, "Deciphering the archives," 301. Even though Sforza archives did not suffer the dispersals marring the integrity of some Renaissance state papers, later librarians and archivists "rationalized" the correspondence to such a degree that it requires extensive and detailed reconstructive efforts to understand how Cicco Simonetta masterminded the core internal and external diplomatic corpus of the Sforza state. On the 164 letters related to the last illness of Bianca Maria Visconti, the dowager duchess, see Nicoud, "Expérience de la maladie et échange épistolaire: les derniers moments de Bianca Maria Visconti (Mai-Octobre 1468)," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Moyen Âge* 112 (2000): 311–458.

bureaucracies rest among items of greater import, such as the frantic letter from the Health Office deputies to duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza, May 2, 1468. The Secret Council at Chiaravalle informed the duke that an assistant did not show up for work, and his salary was summarily withheld. The Secret Council or the assistant himself must have informed the health deputies, because they wrote to explain that his absence from duty was necessary. They cited letters sent to the duke over the previous days as evidence. The assistant's daughter had visited the house of a priest who later died of plague, and the Health Office thus commanded, following explicit ducal advice, that the assistant absent himself from the city for a few days.⁴² Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza micromanaged and second-guessed Health Office decisions, and thus the reports this year bulge with minutiae, satisfying his trivial inquiries as well as explaining containment rationale at important junctures.

Details about the intramural generation of a formal register, including divisions of office space and responsibility within the chancery itself, are not easily determined from information within the 1468 letters and reports. But even during the anxious moments suggested by the long letter just quoted, during 1468 we can find Sforza's great chancellor, Cicco Simonetta at the Secret Chancery, anxiously awaiting a copy of the day's interim (non-narrative) death list. A late April letter from a clerk serving at the Castello Sforza requested that a colleague at the Health Office send him the bundle of reports [*filza deli scripti dela sanitate*] as soon as possible, "because the great lord Cicco wants them immediately...please put them in my hands as soon as you possibly can."⁴³ To reinforce the urgency he labeled the note "*Cito. Cito.*" Quickly, quickly. The same header appeared on other letters as well, both to and from the Health Office.⁴⁴

Paperwork management in a great plague (1485)

Very likely a process of recording deaths in triplicate was well established by 1468: a daily letter to the duke; reports in daily letters to the Secret Council and/or Secret Chancery; and a working office copy or template which would be copied into a formal death register. Keeping up with daily tasks, even in a relatively minor

42 ASMi, *Misc. Stor.*, cart. 2, n. 11.

43 ASMi, *Misc. Stor.*, cart. 2, n. 8, an undated letter sandwiched between one dated April 27 and another dated May 2, written by Thomas de Hesio, of the *Cancellaria Secreto*, to Johannes de Velato: "*Compar mio caro vogliatimi mandare la filza deli scripti dela sanitate, perche el M.co d. Cecho li vole qui preso se e vogliatili drizare in mia mano et più presto posseti...*" In Venetian archives a *filza* referred to documents sewn together into volumes, which does not seem to be the case here, although "Magnifico Cecho" may have wanted two different reports tacked together – the daily death report and a report of illnesses. On Venetian practices see Filippo de Vivo, "Ordering the Archive in Early Modern Venice (1400–1650)," *Archival Science*, 10 (2010): 231–248.

44 E.g., ASMi, *Sforzesco*, *Carteggio interno*, 884, dated May 2, 1468 and to the Duke, but as half the letter is destroyed I could not determine who wrote it. The missive describes precautions taken against the spread of plague along the waterways and passes in the dominions.

plague year (1468) surely required different clerks or scribes stationed at different desks in the office, each with different tasks to perform, mirroring the compartmentalized record-keeping of larger state chanceries. Further evidence for triplicate reporting comes from letters sent during the next great plague during the mid-1480s. Some documents suggest that less experienced clerks first drafted letters to the duke, which were then corrected by either chancellor Bartolomeo Calco (at the Castello Sforza), or the Health Commissioner, Giangiacomo Vaprio (at the *Sanità*).⁴⁵

From copied daily lists of deaths and a separate list of newly identified plague cases, we learn something of the very desperate two months of this major plague, between mid-September and mid-November 1485. A few are missing, but most were stored subsequently with other state papers. Alas they no longer survive in one archival location. Many letters signed by the Health Office commissioner were bundled together under Giangiacomo Vaprio's name by nineteenth-century archivists, then relegated to a box of miscellaneous Sforza correspondence. Some of the 1485 lists that we possess were likely dispatched by courier, along with the commissioner's letters. Other death and illness reports are scattered across different Sforza repositories. I surely have not located all surviving evidence from this plague, but I found sufficient records from the month of peak mortality to analyze in the section below.⁴⁶

One bound register from 1485 survives, devoted to the registration of new cases of plague. It gives a false sense of a volume comparable to the extant annual death register of 1483, a year when early cases of plague appeared in the city. The 1485 register appears to be a cleaned (because there are few bits of information crossed out, added, or overwritten); and standard book of the dead (because it is now filed along with other bound death registers). Actually it is quite a selective subset of newly identified household cases of plague. The volume is now damaged by water and ink stains, illegible in places especially during the catastrophic mortality peak, mid- to late-October.⁴⁷ Atypically, pages at the end of this register were commandeered to record the names of 618 persons sent to San Gregorio, then a makeshift lazaretto. The list here is also a partial record, with only those sent between early January 1485 and mid-July 1485. Before July 15, 42.4 percent of those consigned to the isolation camp died. A further 58 individuals were

45 An extraordinary example of such revisions can be found in ASMi, *Misc. Stor.*, 1, n. 15, dated January 21, 1485, from Milan.

46 Most of the death reports signed by GianJacopo de Vaprio are tied together in ASMi, *Misc. Stor.*, cart. 1, and in ASMi, *Misc. Stor.*, cart. 3. In both boxes we now find death and illness reports (some signed, some not) from different years, and correspondence that de Vaprio signed. Comparable death reports and letters from precisely the same time period but signed generically "Ill[ustrissi]me D[omini] V[est]re Servitores Deputati Sanitatis," instead are grouped together in ASMi, *Misc. Stor.*, cart. 2.

47 ASMi, *Popolazione, p.a.*, cart. n. 77. Why the office kept a bound register of new cases is not clear, but they did so again as plague cases multiplied in 1523. In the following year, 1524, Milan suffered catastrophic mortality. Perhaps a bound register was easier to work with in case-tracking and followup than many slips of paper would have been.

dispatched to the campground over the next 10 days, but their fate is unknown because the office clerk stopped transferring the information from San Gregorio to the new-cases book.⁴⁸

The Health Office typically did not confirm the causes of death of those placed in household isolation, unless a sudden death occurred, following a month or more that the family passed without troubles. Each day the duke received a standard letter listing deaths in the city and suburbs, which show that during the worst weeks 150 to 300 persons died each day (a tally that includes those in household isolation, new cases of plague, and those who died of some cause other than plague). The duke was also sent a letter with a list of new plague cases, some of whom were deceased at the time of first report. Even though secondary household plague deaths were reported daily in letters to the duke, many families were instead summarily removed from their houses and taken to an extramural isolation facility or campground. The incomplete list of families sent to San Gregorio suggests that a separate record book organized by date and by family group was the format for this kind of isolation procedure. But we know nothing of deaths or survivors in San Gregorio during the peak months of this plague, because any books kept there do not seem to have been routed to the Health Office for subsequent storage.⁴⁹ Nor do we know of deaths at other isolation areas outside the city walls. Thus no comprehensive 1485 register of all the urban and suburban deaths exists. Mortality tallies in Milan have seemed low to some investigators because deaths in plague confinement areas were never routinely included in city registers.

For 1485 we can be somewhat confident that a final register of urban and suburban deaths was never made. The close, but not perfect, correspondence between the names, dates, locations, and diagnoses found in the extant "new cases" register and these daily reports to the duke, suggests that the office was willing, but that routine paper management was buckling under the strain of the day-to-day. An unusual epic lament written by Sforza partisan Bettino da Trezzo provides precious bits of information about department activities that surviving health office

48 The corresponding 10 days covered by the "new cases" listed earlier in the register included 247 individuals, 104 of whom (42.1 percent) were deceased at the time of first report. Overall, approximately one-third of all victims in newly identified plague households were deceased at the time the diagnosis was made, and typically new-case reports do not include information about the status of other members of the household, unless they, too, showed signs of plague. It is difficult to trace the fate of those still living at the time of first diagnosis, because some were isolated in household, some taken outside the city.

49 See here Dante E. Zanetti, "A Milano nel 1524: i sospetti del Gentilino," in *Fatti e idee di storia economica nei secoli xii-xx. Studi dedicati a Franco Borlandi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1976), 313–337. Zanetti used an anomalous volume listing plague-suspect persons from the Ticinese district sent to a graveyard campground area outside that gate. This volume has much in common with the format used to list those sent to San Gregorio in 1485, lists bound into the "new cases" book. Whole families are listed together, with their ages and status within the household, making subsequent notations of the date of death for those who did not survive. This register is not found in the Sforza archives; instead in the Milanese city archives [*Archivio Storico Civico, Milano, fondo Epidemie*, cart. 349].

correspondence and death lists do not convey. Bettino published his long poem and dedicated it to cardinal Ascanio Sforza in 1488. Trying to capture the scale of this rabid [*rabiosa*], multi-year pestilence across Lombardy, stressing what was noble and what endured, Bettino praised in turn the people and built infrastructure of four stricken Lombard cities. He asked the cardinal not to overlook the good efforts of Milan's rulers [*Signori*] and [health] deputies, to quickly seal the infected in their houses and provide them food. In the pages devoted to plague in Milan, he claimed that the *anziani* were themselves struggling to inform the office, and that they were the linchpin for the entire process – both recording the dead and sending out the Health Office physician or surgeon to aid the ill. Meanwhile, he claimed that the tireless Giovanni Catelano was everywhere, “expert in these matters and in providing medicine and services so that the ill would recover.”⁵⁰ Even as parish and district elders struggled to provide hourly notices of those who died and fell ill, the deputies valiantly tried to reach a diagnosis about each newly suspected case.⁵¹ Ultimately reporting, list-making, and city services came to a standstill – all business ceased, the rich fled, sounding bells for the dead was banned, and so many were buried occultly that a true count of those lost could not be made.⁵² Bettino's is a rare voice, but not a unique one. Bernardino Corio, a still young man working his way into the inner circle of the Sforza chancery at the Castello, fled the city just before conditions descended to the desperate stage, and began his famous history of Milan while waiting for the plague to end.⁵³

State plague surveillance and the diagnosis of causes of death

In histories of the passport we find nods to the role of plague surveillance in the origin of identity papers and in state documentation of individual identities.⁵⁴ A

50 Bettino da Trezzo, *Letimologia* (Milan: A. Zarotto, 1488), d5 recto: “*Et non dimancho bona provisione / Facta era da Signori, et deputati / In inchiodare statim linfectati / Nelle lor case, et dargli cibatione. / In farli visitar dal cathellano / Medico experto in cio, cum provedergli / De medicine et servi mantenergli / Fin che linfermo se facesse sano.*” Bettino then tries to list in ways faithful to his rhyming scheme, the various services that physicians, surgeons, and barbers could offer, as well as mention San Gregorio as the official city plague hospital.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., d5 verso: “*O quanti per le case, corte et horti / Per strete et per terragi ove al presente / Signal non ce, son stati occultamente / Sepulti da streshora corpi morti. / De quali nulla e facta descriptione / Unde nel calcular li mancati / Al fine piu seran che li notati et non se ne sapra render rason.*”

53 See the biography by Stefano Meschini, *Uno storico umanista alla corte sforzesca* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1995), 69, quoting the beginning of Corio's 1503 tome: “*In questo anno [1485] la città Milano cominciò a laborare de grande pestilentia per il cui grave periculo de morbo io, auctore presente, stando in solitudine, died principio al componer de la presente historia....*”

54 In general see John Torpey, “Coming and Going: On the State Monopolization of the Legitimate ‘Means of Movement,’” *Sociological Theory* 16, no. 3 (1998): 239–258; Jane Caplan and J. Torpey, eds., *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Edward Higgs, *Identifying the English: A History of Personal Identification, 1500 to the Present* (London: Continuum, 2011), 10–15. On Renaissance-era passports specifically, see

generation ago Carlo Cipolla emphasized instead a progressive public health narrative, citing the importance of permanent Health Boards. Their top-down implementation of various surveillance policies in times of plague was hampered only by the lack of a modern conception of plague's causes.⁵⁵ Valentin Groebner's more recent work exposes just how problematic it is and was, to describe a person on paper, so that the person holding the paper and the person standing before a guard can be readily and unambiguously assimilated.⁵⁶ These topics and perspectives offer different wide-lens approaches to state plague surveillance strategies beyond the scope of this limited study. I will instead focus on the difficulty of translating a visual and storied diagnosis of plague into discrete causes of death.

Pre- and postmortem diagnoses were made among persons known to one another in a face-to-face urban neighborhood context, involving discussions or negotiations particularly when a plague diagnosis could be the outcome. The household consequences for such pronouncement were dire. In Milan, I believe, the boundary phenomena between plague and non-plague symptoms and signs tilted the balance of contested plague diagnoses to observable bodily appearances. Plague's identity could be established by unambiguous markers on cadavers. Seen in the surviving records after 1500, two different Health Office formulas in the records illustrate the creation of a category of "possible plague," when the physical signs were ambivalent but worrying, or when a death was sudden, but the cadaver did not reveal certain bodily evidence of plague. The first formula indicated warning signs or symptoms: "*advertentum est.*" Thus "Caterina de Vicecomitibus of Sero, 76 years old, was reported dead without any apparent extrinsic sign of plague, by report in 3 days, which is a warning sign. I do not say pestilence, but dubious. In the judgment of Magister Dyonisio." The other phrase indicated a decision taken to isolate the household for a few days, waiting to see if other residents fell ill: "*separatur/antur per aliquos dies.*" Thus with "Ambrosius de Vicecomitibus of Milan, 12 years old, was reported dead with a tumor in his right groin, by report with symptoms [*accidentibus*] not specifically pestiferous, in 11 days. I find it best that they remain with themselves for a few days, out of caution [*remaneat in se per aliquos dies ad cautelam*]." ⁵⁷

Social and cultural historians since Michel Foucault and Anthony Giddens argue that the state assigns, rather than negotiates, a person's identity, extracting what information best suits its indirect exercise of power. The underlying assumption is

Daniel Nordman, "Sauf-conduits et passeports en France à la Renaissance," in *Voyager à la Renaissance*, edited by Jean Ceard and Jean-Claude Margolin, Actes du colloque de Tours, 1983 (Paris: Éditions maisonneuve et Larose, 1987), 145–158.

55 Cipolla, *Public Health and the Medical Profession* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 16–31, with an illustration of a health pass p. 26, Figure 2.

56 Valentin Groebner, "Describing the person, reading the signs in late medieval and Renaissance Europe: identity papers, vested figures, and the limits of identification, 1400–1600," in *Documenting Individual Identity*, 15–27. And see Groebner's more recent *Who Are You? Identification, Deception and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

57 ASMi, *Popolazione, p.a.*, reg. 80, deaths on October 12, 1503, for Caterina, and on May 2, 1503, for Ambrosius.

that registration is undertaken to make subjects more easily found and governed, or to provide an aggregate picture of individual subjects that it would not be in a position to know.⁵⁸ Thus humble, previously invisible subjects, become “legible,” to use James C. Scott’s classic formulation, changing the fundamental relationship between ruler(s) and ruled. I argued above that identification of the person – his or her social identity – was captured by a Sforza office, but offered recognition rather than reflected a state assignment of an identity. Whether or not an individual died of plague (or, later, some other stigmatized illness) depended on a state assignment of a cause of death, an identity with consequences to survivors and/or the still-living victim. In other words, a diagnosis of cause of death is better seen as an extractive process of state development.

Reports to the duke during October 1485 permit assessment of the Health Office’s practices in making a positive identification of plague, and reveal some aspects of officials’ subaltern status among Milanese elites and Sforza bureaucratic hierarchies, accentuated during a period of considerable stress. From September 28 to November 2, we have a 35-day sample that lacks only one day’s list of subsequent deaths among those placed in household isolation, which were assumed to be plague-caused. Over this time period the Duke’s chancery received notice of the deaths of 4,201 individuals, 19.7 percent of whom were newly identified cases of plague (838 persons). Four-fifths of all reported deaths over this interval occurred among those in household isolation.⁵⁹ Two percent of the 4,201 deaths were individuals previously reported as ill from plague (*havisti pro infirmo*), and slightly under 3 percent were deaths attributed to some cause other than plague.

Analyzing the names, parishes, and other personal identifiers of all these victims, I found only few repeated names (coupled to parish and diagnosis) in every thousand deaths, duplications surely exceeded by inevitable omissions. One sad entry of October 12 provides us some reflection of the clerical tasks involved in a round-the-clock operation. The clerk compiling a list for the duke of the newly identified cases (105 reports, all with diagnoses), included this name at the bottom of the third page of the letter: “*Petrus Antonius de Niguarda, filius meus*” [Pierantonio Niguarda, my son] – a 12-year-old lad with a continuous fever, nosebleeds, and now “black measles,” typically a death-sentence with plague.⁶⁰

58 Szreter and Breckenridge, “Recognition and registration.” Despite the useful critique that Szreter and Breckenridge offer, still helpful in understanding the death (and cause-of-death) registration process is Scott’s short essay, “The trouble with the view from above,” in *Seeing Like a State: A Conversation with James C. Scott* (Cato Institute, 2010), stable URL: <http://www.cato-unbound.org/2010/09/08/james-c-scott/trouble-view-above>

59 On October 31 there were 11 deaths among the 28 new cases of plague identified. The prior two days had 185 and 187 deaths of individuals within closed houses, thus the missing records are likely close to these tallies. Recall that we do not know numbers of deaths in suburban isolation camps.

60 Hopefully the child survived, for his name does not occur on the death reports sent to the duke over the following 10 days. However, it is difficult to track deaths of individuals within specific households. A different Petrus Antonius de Niguarda died of “*squinantia*”

A different subset of letters reported newly identified cases of plague to the duke, permitting assessment of the diagnostic criteria that the Health Office used with plague. During October, 653 of 1,669 new plague cases (39.1 percent) were deceased at the time of initial diagnosis. Plague was typically confirmed (87.4 percent of the cases) by some visible lesion considered to be *prima facie* evidence of plague. Table 10.3 analyzes the criteria used to justify a plague diagnosis, omitting 10 cases where particulars of the individual record were illegible. Multiple visualized lesions were reported in 19.5 percent of these diagnoses, slightly under 2 percent of the diagnoses added the ill person's symptoms to report of a lesion. Thus the totals in the table exceed the number of individuals diagnosed as new plague cases. Of those who had no visible plague lesions, 164 (9.9 percent) had been ill fewer than four days before death, a proxy criterion that led the Health Office to sequester the inhabitants of a household. Imposing isolation or evicting a family relied on mostly physical lesions on the body of the first-identified household

TABLE 10.3 Plague-specific diagnoses reported with all new cases of plague, October 1485, n=1,659

<i>Observed lesion (%)</i>	<i>Diagnostic words</i>	<i>Number of times used</i>
Some kind of discrete, localized swelling 1,112 (67%)	bubo	565
	<i>glandula</i>	278
	tumor	17
	aposteme	243
	<i>eminentia</i>	9
Some kind of localized necrotic lesion 232 (1.4%)	anthrax	3
	plague pustule	7
	<i>carbone/carbuncullo</i>	222
Some kind of rash or cluster of lesions 468 (29.3%)	pestilential measles	245
	black measles	78
	purplish measles	7
	red measles	2
	"measles" only	154
Nonspecific, without mention of a specific visible lesion 309 (18.6%)	pestilential fever	155
	"plague" alone	95
	plague "signs"	59

(throat swelling) on October 6, but he was 50 years old at death, and from a different area of the city. Was the clerk now considered a plague suspect, receiving the news about his son? Existing documents are silent, but at this point in the 1485 plague, with hundreds dying each day, every member of the Health Office could have been considered contaminated in the strictest contemporary interpretation of possible plague risk.

case, directly observed by a physician or surgeon working for the *Sanità*. In other words, confirming a diagnosis of plague did not necessarily rely upon interviews with *anziani* or neighbors.⁶¹

A fifth of all new-case reports (21.4 percent) offered two or more different findings as evidence of a new case of plague, and most of the physical lesions reported (swellings, rashes, and sores or blisters) were further described by location on the victim's body. Table 10.4 summarizes localizing information about the categories of principal plague lesions listed in Table 10.3. Plague diagnoses were made by two individuals in the Health Office: the indomitable Giovanni Catelano (59.4 percent) and surgeon Dionysio of Nursia (27.6 percent).⁶² These two men had worked together for two decades, going in tandem to confirm plague cases early in an epidemic. Therefore we can be confident that they agreed about postmortem plague appearances. As plague worsened over October 1485, the office added the services of a Jewish surgeon, usually referred to only as "maestro Guglielmo," who provided 11 percent of the new-case diagnoses in October, none of them based on anything other than a visible bodily lesion.⁶³ A fourth man, Carlo Gonzaga, another surgeon joined the team, but most of his reports came in November and December. Catelano alone provided over half of all October diagnoses. In other words together three *Sanità* doctors reported 98 percent of all new-case diagnoses.

These tallies during an interval of very high mortality once again show office workloads, staff altruism, and the commitment of parish and district authorities to recognition of citizen deaths. But Table 10.4 wrestles with the elusive link between diagnostic processes, state surveillance, and identification of persons. While plague was literally read, thus was legible, from bodily appearances, *Sanità* diagnosticians seem to provide a kind of legal testimony to their inspection of the cadaver, what would have been gratuitous medical information: the side and location of a swelling and the anatomical location of a plague carbuncle.⁶⁴ Bodily evidence thus

61 However, 26 new cases (1.5 percent) were confirmed by members of the household, 23 of these persons dead at the time of first report.

62 I provide a list of Catelano's commonly reported diagnoses in "Epidemics and State Medicine in Fifteenth-Century Milan," in *Medicine from the Black Death to the French Disease*, ed. Roger French et al. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 224–225.

63 He was probably the same person also called "the Sicilian" in some later records. The accusations made against Health Office diagnosticians by early December may reflect the anti-Semitism for which Milan was well known in the later Middle Ages. See Germano Maifreda, "The Jews: Institutions, Economy, and Society," in *A Companion to Late Medieval and Early Modern Milan*, ed. A. Gamberini (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 388–390.

64 The side on which a lesion appeared was not irrelevant to surgeons of this era, who determined which vein should be opened in order to draw corrupted humoral matter away from the heart. See Pedro Gil-Sotres, "Derivation and Revulsion: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Phlebotomy," in *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death*, ed. Luis García-Ballester et al. (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 110–155; and Linda E. Voigts and Michael R. McVaugh, "A Latin Technical Phlebotomy and Its Middle English Translation", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 74, no. 2 (1984): 1–69. However the *Sanità* surgeons were not providing medical care, thus not testifying to bloodletting performed on plague victims.

TABLE 10.4 Bodily localization of plague-specific lesions, new cases, October 1485

<i>Observed lesion</i>	<i>Localizing words</i>	<i>Number reported</i>
Any discrete, localized swelling, by side	right side	438
	left side	499
	both sides	36
Swelling anatomical location on victim's body	axilla (t=260)	10 (no side given)
		116 (right side)
		127 (left side)
		7 (both sides)
	specifically inguinal (t=378)	20 (no side given)
		156 (right side)
		172 (left side)
		24 (both sides)
	femoral or groin (t=328)	18 (no side given)
		116 (right side)
		146 (left side)
		4 (both sides)
	cervical (t=96)	25 (no side given)
		28 (right side)
		45 (left side)
		1 (both sides)
Location of a swelling in a non-lymphatic location	arm	7
	ankle	1
	below breast	1
	on tibia	1
	on stomach	1
Specific necrotic lesions noted	anthrax	3
	carbuncle (<i>carbone</i> , <i>carbuncullo</i>)	221
	pestilential pustule(s)	7
Commonest specific locations where carbuncles were seen	lower extremities	22
	upper extremities	29
	head, neck, collar	55
	trunk (back, abdomen, thorax), sides	21
	inguinal area, incl. buttocks & <i>coxa</i>	29
	beside, on, or part of a swelling	7

persuaded family, neighbors, and elder that a household's isolation or eviction was justified.

The *Sanità* physicians and surgeons relied on visible bodily signs to identify plague, a process vaguely similar to late medieval mechanisms for making persons who crossed boundary regions individually distinguishable. As Groebner describes, later medieval states increasingly relied on descriptions of badges and distinctive clothing as information by which guards could recognize, apprehend, repel, or avoid a culprit or an outsider.⁶⁵ The techniques used to determine causes of death in the later Middle Ages, physical and observational as well as interrogative, resembled strategies that early governing authorities invented to apprehend travelers, itinerant beggars, and vagabonds. Distinguishing markings on bodies, interrogating a suspect's origins, recent itinerary, and contacts, all while alerting colleagues elsewhere to look for persons with similar social characteristics, were tactics used to identify plague within, or approaching, a city. Alerted to danger, privileged persons could plan escape routes from an area before contact with dangerous persons and places became inevitable. Exposing the culprit, in this case plague, justified the implementation of a range of epidemic containment practices, many of which echoed actions against criminals.⁶⁶

The diagnosis of plague on the basis of specific lesions seen on cadavers evolved contemporarily with state-generated mechanisms for determining individual identity. Experienced, dedicated Health Office physicians and surgeons provided detailed observations of signs and symptoms of plague consistent with descriptions that one might find in academic plague treatises, but the language and practice of plague diagnosis in public health context shared more with the courtroom than the classroom. *Sanità* medical personnel essentially served as expert witnesses, with a professional and public duty to report crimes.⁶⁷ "Autopsy" literally and originally meant "the action or process of seeing with one's own eyes; personal observation, inspection, or experience."⁶⁸ Persons for whom a plague diagnosis was disputed or ambivalent were called suspects. Judicial action, calling upon the authority of the

65 Groebner, *Who Are You?*, 48–54, and 72–82, discussing badges as "true tokens" or receipts that mattered to individual identification. Tokens (such as pilgrims' badges or licenses to beg) could be stolen or falsified, leading to the invention of multiple official ways to recognize persons from names and distinguishing marks on bodies.

66 Alessandro Pastore, *Crimine e giustizia in tempo di peste nel Europa moderna* (Bari: Laterza, 1991).

67 Joanna Carraway Vitiello, "Forensic evidence, lay witnesses and medical expertise in the criminal courts of late medieval Italy," in *Medicine and the Law in the Middle Ages*, edited by S. Butler and Wendy Turner, eds. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 133–156.

68 *Oxford English Dictionary*, first definition of the noun "autopsy." Katharine Park's modern classic, "The criminal and the saintly body: autopsy and dissection in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1994): 1–33, uses the term with its acquired, modern (nineteenth-century) meaning, determining cause of death by opening, inspecting, and sometimes dissecting a cadaver, but details many circumstances under which ambivalent bodily appearances and ambiguous clinical signs led later medieval authorities to resolve differences in expert opinions.

state and local authorities, was the result of a plague diagnosis.⁶⁹ Full exploration of the legal aspects of making a diagnosis of plague and the juridical status of public health physicians and surgeons requires further study.⁷⁰

Burrowing into the letters sent to the duke and his Secret Chancery, we also see the early phases of long, slow processes of administrative centralization and governmental “aristocratization” which have made Milan a favorite locus for the study of territorial state development in Italy, 1300–1700.⁷¹ Routinely the Health Office deferred to both medical and political authorities. Numerous letters to the dukes report bodily evidence of a plague diagnosis, but include pro-forma acknowledgment that the duke was free to decide otherwise in particular cases.⁷²

The analysis of diagnostic criteria used in new cases of plague, October 1485, is significant because it illustrates how firmly public health staff believed plague usually produced unambiguous bodily evidence of its presence, pre- and postmortem. But deference to the elite medical community is clear in a June 2 diagnosis. A prominent native physician, Matteo Busti, reported the death of a 30-year-old woman who had been in the care of another community practitioner, Niccolò Niguarda, for various complaints, but when she became mentally disoriented her urine was brought to Matteo for analysis. After a complex description of the appearance of her urine, Matteo claimed that the most confused aspect of the case was the order of the symptoms, which led him to decide that her illness was a “parafrensy” and time would tell whether she would live or die. He put a plague diagnosis in doubt by noting that he made his judgment on the seventh day of her illness. Together viewing the woman’s cadaver to make the official diagnosis, Catelano and Dyonisio, explained that the attending physicians wondered whether their diagnoses were true, or only seemingly so. “We, however, saw this dead

69 In a long case that I provided elsewhere, in “Contagion Theory and Contagion Practice,” 222, one of Catelano’s reports to the duke explicitly describes the ambivalence of interpreting some symptoms and signs. Describing a sudden swelling in the *left* groin of a 35-year old man, Catelano claimed, “There is that which accuses and that which excuses.” In this case a brief clinical course suggested plague, but the man insisted that he had gone horseback riding, and was unaccustomed to that activity. Moreover, the defendant protested that he was distraught because his son had recently been bitten by a rabid dog, and he was weak and nauseated from the experience.

70 For important work on the topic for a later era see Silvia De Renzi, “Medical Expertise, Bodies, and the Law in Early Modern Courts,” *Isis* 98 (2007): 315–322.

71 John A. Marino, “The Italian States in the ‘Long Sixteenth Century,’” in Thomas A. Brady, Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, James D. Tracy, *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. 1: Structures and Assertions (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1994), 347–348. Nicoud’s important “Les Médecins et l’Office de santé,” sees the Health Office physicians, especially Catelano, enlarging the sphere of competence among all Milanese physicians. While I fully agree with her praise of their skills, I cannot find unambiguous evidence that they were accorded comparable social or professional status to academic and ducal practitioners.

72 For example, ASMi, *Misc. Stor.*, 4, June 25, 1485 “... havemo hogi trovato una infirmata pestilentielle ne la parochia de S.to Protaxio porta Cumana fora in el burgeto, in la quali gli habita Zohanne da Rippa, Ducale Provisionato in el Castello, sicke proveda v. M. come pare et piace,” emphasis mine.

woman, finding a swelling and abscess in her right groin.” They conceded that the lesion “could come from something other than plague, such as a crisis [i.e., the clinically decisive endpoint of a disease process]” or from significant “accidents of the soul.”⁷³

Health Office staff would not have dismissed Galenic explanations about the pathological processes involved with plague, but epidemic intervals could not be managed by protracted and deliberate inquiries about the course of a patient’s last illness. Such practical concerns led other Italian cities to defer diagnosis to those who were not medically trained. Because Milanese public health diagnosticians instead possessed education and experience comparable to all but the elite healers working in the city, they strove for a dialogue that could make their experience and expertise useful to professional discussions. At different points during 1485, for example, Catelano offered some conclusions worth the attention of local academic physicians. Once he observed that the latest death reported from “true pleurisy on the left side” should be considered a contagious disease. Not only had the man’s wife and one of his daughters suffered the same illness over the two preceding days, he had reported many other deaths of pleurisy clustering in late winter.⁷⁴ No one in the powerful Milanese medical establishment was listening.

Public health staff were subalterns of the state, rarely praised for their dedication and risk-taking. After the loss of more than 10,000 lives during the 1485 plague, a letter to the duke on December 8 well illustrates their subordinate status. Sforza advisor Tommaso Tornieli expressed the anger, not futility, of many of the duke’s trusted advisors. Every reasonable measure of plague control had failed over the past few months, but Tornieli blamed the local authorities and public health workers, men who altruistically remained in place and on task throughout the epidemic.

Yesterday these [Health] Deputies and [state] counselors met in the Castello, to decide together how to go about eradicating this plague. They ordered that every one of the said Deputies should be assigned to a city gate. And with the description of all the still-infected houses they should do nothing else except attend to the problem of cleaning and disinfecting these places, burning all that could be cleaned only with difficulty. They concluded that there was no other explanation for the infection lasting so long in the city than the presence of cloth that until now has not been sufficiently disinfected. Tomorrow those

73 “Accidents of the soul” were one of the Galenic “non-naturals,” changeable influences that could alter the course of an illness. ASMi, *Misc. stor.*, 4, n. 788, June 2, 1485.

74 ASMi, *Misc. stor.*, 4, n. 739, February 15, 1485, sent to the duke by Giangiacomo Vaprio: “Reynaldus de Pergamo, annorum xlvii...infirmatur a die veneris citra pleuresi vera lateris sinistri, satis difficilis et periculosa de contagii, et morte decesserunt [sic] hac causa et uxor et quedam sua filia. Sunt enim ut predie dixi huius pleureses altera epidemia atque pestilencia considerabitur. Chatelani. Decessit hodie xv presentis uts.” Catelano offered another report of worrisome death from pleurisy, associated with plague that struck him as a “new species of epidemic,” [*novum genus epidemie*]: ASMi, *Misc. stor.* 1, n. 667, November 30, 1485.

few physicians who can be rounded up will meet and deputize two to go over all the diagnoses [*iudicii*] and determine which were deliberately falsified. Meanwhile the said Deputies today are to deliberate with these doctors and learn what they think will work best.⁷⁵

In this document we find yet another way an emerging state confronted traditional sources of authority in the late medieval era, making medical men answer for their actions and judgments to ducal employees. The document serves as a contrast to the larger arguments of Marilyn Nicoud and Giuliana Albini, who both offer exceptionally valuable studies of medicine and public health in late medieval Milan, works that I have used throughout this study. While I do not counter the broader contexts that each of these scholars places on the archival repositories, neither assigns emphasis on, nor credit and agency for innovation on, Sforza subalterns. Nicoud attributes unique Milanese “medicalization” of urban death registers to the active collaboration between established, educated physicians and surgeons on the one hand, and the Duke Gian Galeazzo Visconti and his health commissioner, on the other; their collaborative tradition persisted and was refined over the fifteenth century despite changes in regime. Albini, on the other hand, emphasizes the fundamental control that the Ambrosian church had over all health services; clearly had the parish elders not collaborated with Sforza health department personnel, record-keeping at the level of detail accomplished would not have been possible.⁷⁶ My argument neither challenges nor opposes either perspective, both urging the fundamentally medieval character and origins of the documents. I merely suggest that we might usefully see these mortality records as evidence of bureaucratic consolidation, a new attitude toward documentation, and registration (both as recognition and as surveillance) as useful tools of governance.

Conclusion

This study describes Milan’s civic mortality registers in order to connect these specific documents to larger social and political changes underway in the fifteenth century, a watershed era between a time and culture recognizably medieval (at least to scholars), and a society not quite modern. In multiple ways these documents, previously mined for their evidence about plague, public health, and premodern demographic trends, illustrate processes associated with territorial state development. Milan’s mortality registers illustrate both a state interest in plague surveillance and the recognition of individuals through registration. In their production we see the state at work. A sophisticated Sforza state administrative apparatus lay behind

75 *Misc. Stor.* 2, #521.

76 In addition to the works of Nicoud and Albini cited throughout this study, see Albini’s recent summary, “People, groups, and institutions: charity and assistance in the Duchy of Milan from the 15th to the 17th century,” in *A Companion to Late Medieval and Early Modern Milan: The Distinctive Features of an Italian State*, ed. A. Gamberini (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 499–523.

seemingly pedestrian records of the *Magistrato alla Sanità*. Civic mortality registers, initially a response to plague, generally reflect state-initiated information-gathering and record-keeping in late medieval Italian cities. Milan's records are extraordinary, providing an opportunity to examine diagnostic practices in plague. The death registration process was locally successful involving dedicated intramural and extramural office staff collaborating with traditional Milanese governing authorities, and outlasted the dynasty's control by several centuries.

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